



## Alignment Partnering

Successful projects result from committed and dedicated professionals working on interesting and important projects with efficient systems, proper resources and high energy. Every project encounters difficulties; successful projects overcome such obstacles, anticipate and take advantage of opportunities and take proactive steps to limit foreseeable risks. Project Alignment sets up projects using Alignment Partnering to provide focus on the tasks at hand, to forecast risks and opportunities, to manage systems, to encourage professionalism and collaboration, and to deal with inevitable conflicts. It also assists organizations in delegating necessary authority, promoting leadership, developing appropriate feedback systems and anticipating and invoking necessary team expansion or team changes.

## Partnering Basics

Partnering has been embraced in the Construction Industry since the late 1980's and widely utilized since the early 1990's. It was originally developed by the Army Corps of Engineers to rationalize their approach to building large civil, public projects. The purpose was to enhance communication with designers and contractors and put the spotlight on project cooperation. Early partnering efforts therefore focused on the relationship of the parties, trying to bring a more human face to project teams. Partnering has proven especially useful in public owner situations and has been adopted as a model by various federal and state agencies.

State Departments of Transportation have used partnering and studied its effectiveness. These studies have shown that the relationship aspect of the original partnering concept is still important to successful projects. However, one time partnering sessions are usually unable to maintain those relationships and hold teams to "Project First" level thinking. As a consequence, more robust and sustained partnering is required to make the process effective.

A study of partnering in the Texas Department of Transportation done in 1996 highlights this point. The study found "the most beneficial elements of a partnering workshop were problem solving 'rocks in the road,' issue escalation and a relaxed environment." The "least beneficial elements of a partnering<sup>1</sup> workshop were videos, game playing and personality profiles." The term "rocks in the road" referred to "a series of discussions between TxDOT and contractors to identify potential problems associated with a project. By addressing those issues early, strategies can be developed to address the problems before they become costly claims or issues between the two groups." *Id.*

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<sup>1</sup> Grajek, Gibson & Tucker, "Partnered Project Performance in Texas Department of Transportation," *Journal of Infrastructure Systems* (June, 2000)

Other groups have likewise recognized that early and continuous evaluation of progress on the job is required in the partnering process to ensure timely and on budget delivery of jobs. For instance, the Transportation Research Board's *Transportation Research Circular, No. E-C059*, December 2003 argues for "accelerated partnering" and recommends that "a toolbox of techniques should be developed for (a) helping to detect early signs of breakdown in cooperation, (b) recommending ways to improve cooperation and alleviate stress, and (c) suggesting ways to rotate employees or require time off from the project."

The American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials ("AASHTO") also recommends a continuous process to secure the "benefits" of partnering. In its 2005 *Partnering Handbook*, AASHTO lists the reasons robust partnering is important to projects, especially in light of developing technology and the consequent developing complication of projects:

- Joint problem solving
- Increased work efficiency
- Improved project development and delivery processes
- Maximizing program delivery
- Building and strengthening relationships
- Developing innovative products
- Providing services that exceed customer expectations
- Enhancing work processes, plans and functions

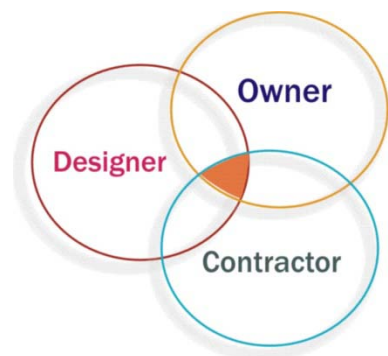
State DOT's have been exceedingly active in the area of fine-tuning their partnering procedures to address today's project needs. Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio and Texas all have appear to have robust partnering programs, usually providing information (e.g., partnering handbooks) underscoring how the process should be implemented in the field.

Alignment Partnering embodies the very processes necessary to make partnering a robust, active, on-going tool box of options for discovering issues on the project and resolving them at the earliest time and at the lowest possible level. Here's how it works:

Alignment partnering drives participants to Third Level Thinking or Project First Thinking. The object of Project First Thinking is to allow people to focus on what is best for the project.

## Three Levels of Thinking

1. (*Level One Thinking*) Personal thinking or "Level One Thinking" is all about personal safety, both actual safety and career safety. It is important that one feels safe in a work environment in order to create the opportunity for that person to excel, contribute and take pride in the successful project. The personal and professional needs of participants in any project have to be recognized and understood. Only in a productive, safe Level One working environment, can a



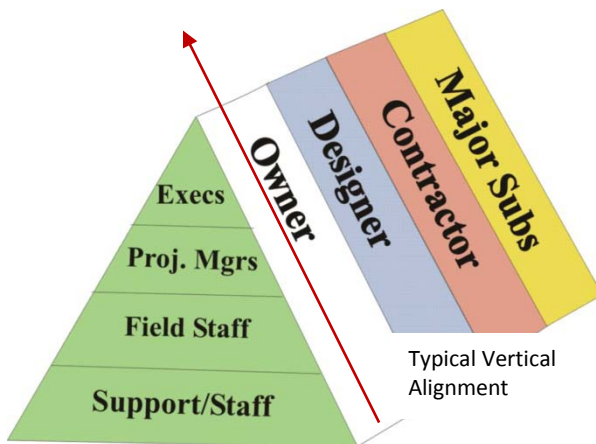
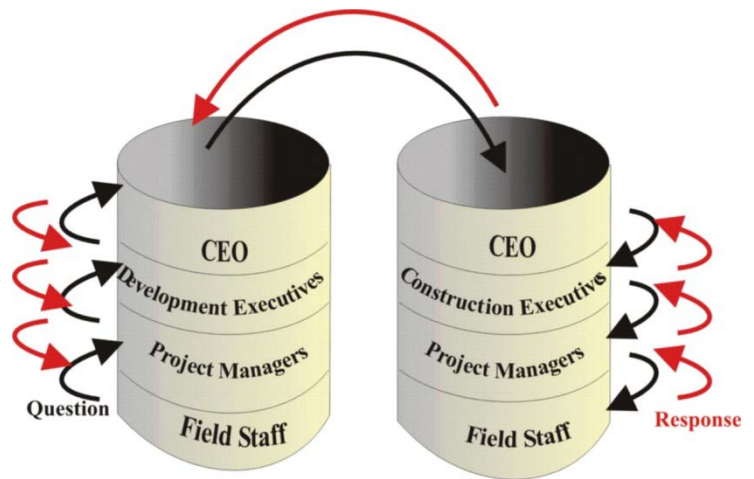
person move up to and work at Level Two.

2. *(Level Two Thinking)* Level Two thinking focuses on team and business outcomes and organizational successes. Attaining business goals contributes to the company's health, growth and longevity. Level Two thinking is the fundamental bridge between the individual and his or her employer. Level Two thinking secures loyalty to the organization and fosters protection of the organization's interests.

3. *(Level Three Thinking)* Once a person feels personally safe **and** feels part of a Level Two team, he or she can begin focusing on the best interests of a given project. Contracts form where organizational interests overlap--at the Project Level. In order for people to process at Level Three, they must feel safe and secure at Levels One and Two. It is only at Level Three that "Project First" thinking lives and thrives. Likewise, only Project First thinking allows for collaboration and trust in delivering the project.

## Project Communication

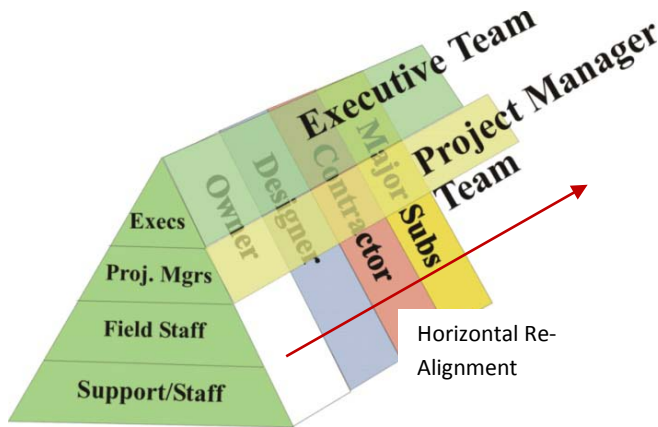
One of the most important goals of Alignment Partnering is to insure that communication is clear, effective and efficient. Construction projects lend themselves to confusing, ineffective and inefficient communication. Typical communication between companies on jobs follows the "silo" pattern—answers to important questions have to be routed through the company, rather than being discussed at the appropriate level and having a joint response sent to the next management level.



regarding the Project.

In Alignment Partnering, project teams are established that more appropriately reflect both the job and the level of authority of the professionals on the project. Rather than the typical vertical configuration of company teams, project teams are realigned or configured to reflect authority and responsibility to the Project.

Thus, the executive officers from the Owner, the Contractor (and its major Subcontractors), the CM and the Designer form an Executive Team to make decisions



Project managers from each company form a separate team to focus the work on the Project, forecast risks and opportunities, meet to decide what recommendations to make to the executive team regarding risks or problems that have arisen on the job and engage in the management of the construction. Other teams deal with implementation on site, supervision of crews, inspections etc., but all with the objective of maximizing the “Project First” effort of all of the Project teams.

## Innovative Project Delivery

Most projects are Design-Bid-Build or CM at Risk. But innovative delivery models like Integrated Project Delivery and Design Build have influenced how we partner projects. Ideas gleaned from Lean Construction theory have also informed our processes so that we have been able to design new, more collaborative and reliable partnering models. Alignment Partnering incorporates techniques and strategies learned from IPD and Design-Build to implement the five principles promoted by the more collaborative delivery models:

- 1) **Real Project Collaboration:** Projects are built by people. The collaboration of all job participants in all aspects of the project is crucial to timely, cost-effective delivery. But in an often adversarial contractual atmosphere (us vs. them), collaboration does not just “happen” by itself. It must be fostered by consciously building healthy personal relationships and sustained by intentional effort. Alignment Partnering leads participants to regularly focus their collaborative discussions on intermediate priorities and forecast risks (to mitigate them) and opportunities (to enhance them).
- 2) **Increase the Relatedness of Project Participants:** An old saying on construction projects is that participants come together as strangers and leave as enemies. We can change that paradigm by developing project relationships founded on trust and sustained by reliable performance. When conflicts and disputes inevitably arise, they can best be resolved quickly in an atmosphere of trust and openness with conscious processes that allow resolution at the lowest horizontal cross-organizational level.
- 3) **Projects are Networks of Commitments:** The fundamental building blocks of design and construction are commitments—I will accomplish this task today so that you can accomplish that task tomorrow. Productivity in every industry **except construction** has improved 100% since 1960. One of the chief reasons construction productivity has actually decreased in that period of time is the lack of reliable commitments—industry studies reveal that only about 54% of what people say they will do in any week is actually performed. Increasing the

performance of people's commitments (Percent of Plan Complete each week) is central to increasing productivity while maintaining costs and schedule.

- 4) **Project First Thinking:** Rather than optimizing the parts of the project, the participants must optimize the whole project itself. Alignment Partnering drives people to Project First Thinking which enables project leaders to think in terms of the best "interests" of the project rather than the legalistic "rights" of the parties. Cross-organizational, horizontal teams can be taught to work in unity and to elevate issues upward to obtain authority to solve problems and keep the Project First.
  
- 5) **Couple Learning with Action:** What we learn from the Project every week needs to be communicated to all participants so that mistakes are not made again and again. This applies directly to safety but also to production and the systems of production. How we pave the first three sections of the highway can inform how we pave the last sections, not just how we pave the next job. Alignment Partnering fosters robust feedback systems enabling a team's continuous reflection and action on lessons learned.