

business issues

CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTING

BY SUE DYER

Using a partnering scorecard can positively influence a project's outcome.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE to be able to predict the potential for the success or failure of your construction projects?

There's obviously no magic bullet, but there is the practice of keeping score. Employing a monthly partnering scorecard, you can in fact get a pretty good handle on what is actually happening on your project—and the scores turn out to be a great predictor of what is going to happen, giving you and your team time to make course corrections *before* certain conclusions become inevitable.

A recent study on the efficacy of partnership during the construction of the steel-framed Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge in Washington, D.C., found that what the team members reported on the partnering scorecard strongly correlated to what was actually going on at that given time on the project. So, the collective wisdom of the team came forth in a clear snapshot of the project's status. (For more on the bridge, see the winners of NSBA's 2009 Prize Bridge Competition in the November 2009 issue at www.modernsteel.com.)

In the International Partnering Institute's Study of 13 different projects that used a monthly partnering scorecard over a two-year period, 12 of the 13 projects' scores improved over the life of the project. Overall, project scores improved by as much as 1.13 points (28%) over the life of the project. The average improvement was about half a point (+0.54, or 14%).



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Training your team members on the partnering scorecard and its importance can go a long way toward overcoming barriers to its use.

Of course, this method does involve commitment. You must use the construction scorecard as a tool. And just like every tool, the better you are at using it, the better the results. Also note that the partnering scorecard isn't administered by a third party, nor is it something you simply download; each team must create their own, likely in the form of a standard template that can be modified for specific projects. That said, here are some tips for getting the most out of whatever you create:

Make the partnering scorecard a requirement. The project scorecard must be a *requirement* and the team must feel that it is valued for them to take the time to share their scores and comments. It is up to the team leader to make this happen. If you take the scorecard seriously, so too will your team members. If you ignore it and don't use it, they will do the same. Putting the requirement into your project

documents will help ensure everyone knows you are serious. Having senior management remind everyone that you want 100% participation in the scorecard on a monthly basis—and convey that it is an important part of your project's success—will get people to complete it. Monitoring and acknowledging those who are completing the scorecard will reinforce its value. Monitoring who is *not* completing the scorecard will help ensure they will complete it next time.

Create an atmosphere of trust. Your partnering effort is designed to develop a culture of trust and collaboration. This fosters the open, honest atmosphere that will allow your scorecard to reflect the good, the bad and the ugly that occurs on your project. The truth will set you free—free to work on what is needed to succeed. Trust happens when you create certainty that you will be fair and resolve issues before they grow into problems or disputes. Having a meaningful partnering and scorecard program takes commitment. Your actions show your commitment. While trust can be built over time, it is highly predictable that your expectations define your relationships. So check yourself to make sure you are not defensive, protective or hostile toward your teammates. *You* will define the atmosphere and it will heavily influence your results.



Understand the tool. The partnering scorecard is a snapshot in time of what is occurring on your project and allows you to measure teamwork effectiveness and the ability to achieve your project's goals. Training your team members on the partnering scorecard and its importance can go a long way toward overcoming barriers to its use.

Evaluate your results. Email your scorecard to everyone on your project team each month—and be sure to evaluate the resulting scores. This can easily be done during a regular weekly project meeting. If you set your scoring to 1-5, with 5 being the highest or most positive score, look at any scores of 1 or 2. These are where the team is feeling frustrated or issues are emerging. Focusing on these areas will help a great deal. Next, look at your 3s. These are OK, and with a little focus might be able to become 4s or better. This will increase your positive momentum dramatically.

Make course corrections. Resolving issues where the team is stuck or frustrated should be your top priority and needs to happen before the next scorecard if possible. You can use a partnering session for this and get the help of a neutral facilitator. Escalating issues up the dispute ladder in a timely fashion is key. Make a decision and move on. In addition, set deadlines and

keep them. This will create trust and a sense of predictability. It is *not* the issues that predict your success or failure but rather how the team deals with the issues. Correct your course so the team stays together and gains positive momentum.

Partnering scorecards are a method of obtaining feedback from team members on performance measures that are key to the successful completion of projects. Questions might cover such topics as effectiveness of internal and external communications, adherence to schedules and timeliness of responses.

Woody Allen once said, “We are all interested in the future, because that is where we are all going to spend our lives.” Think about using a partnering scorecard to allow you to predict how you and your project team will be spending *your* time. Will it be fighting over project disputes because things didn't turn out as hoped? Or will it be celebrating the construction of great buildings and bridges? If you're experiencing the former, a scorecard is a great tool for steering you toward the latter. ■