**Case Buxton Hall**

Chad Cromwell, head of university housing, gazed up at the tower at Buxton Hall and smiled as he walked toward the landmark building.

Buxton Hall was built in 1927 as a residential complex for over 350 students at Pacifica State University. At the time Buxton was the tallest building on campus, and its tower had a panoramic view of the athletic fields and coastal range. Buxton quickly became a focal point at Pacifica State. Students perched on the tower dominated the campus during the annual spring water fight with their huge slingshots and catapults. The first intranet on the Pacific coast was created at Buxton that linked students' computers and allowed them to share printers. Around the 1970s, some student artists began the tradition of painting their room doors. Whether a Rolling Stones logo or Bugs Bunny on a skateboard, these colorful doors were an artistic legacy that caught the attention of students and faculty.

Buxton Hall served as a residence hall for the university for many years, but time was not kind to the stately building. Leaks destroyed plaster in the interior. Wiring and plumbing became outdated and so dangerous that the building was deemed unsafe. Buxton Hall's doors were closed to students and windows boarded up at the end of the 1996 spring quarter. For 10 years Buxton sat silent and over time became a symbol of the general decline of Pacifica State. Now thanks to state bonds and generous contributions, Buxton Hall was about to be reopened after a $20 million renovation.

**18 MONTHS AGO**

Chad and key representatives from university facilities were engaged in the second of a two-day partnering workshop. Also in attendance were managers from Crawford Construction, the chief contractor for the Buxton renovation project, as well as several key subcontractors and architects from the firm of Legacy West. During the first day a consultant ran them through a series of team-building and communication exercises that accentuated the importance of open communication, principle negotiation, and win/win thinking. Today's session began with the “project from hell” exercise, with each group describing the worst project they had ever worked on. Chad was surprised that the people from Crawford and Legacy West descriptions were very similar to his own. For example, each group talked about how frustrating it was when changes were made without proper consultation or costs were hidden until it was too late to do anything about them. This was followed by a discussion of the best project they had ever worked on. The consultant then asked the groups which of the two they wanted the Buxton project to be. A genuine sense of common purpose emerged, and everyone became actively engaged in spelling out in specific terms how they wanted to work together. The session concluded with all of the participants signing a partnering charter followed by a picnic and a friendly softball game.

12 MONTHS AGO

Chad was on his way, with Nick Bolas, to meet Dat Nguyen, the Crawford Project Manager, on the third floor at Buxton tower. Dat had contacted him to discuss a problem with the tile work in one of the communal bathrooms. Dat's people had completed the work, but Nick, who was a Pacifica facilities manager, refused to sign off on it claiming that it was not up to spec. After a 24-hour impasse, the Crawford foreman exercised the escalation clause in partnering agreement and passed the issue up to management's level to be resolved. Dat and Chad inspected the work. While both agreed that the job could have been prettier, it did meet specification and Chad told Nick to sign off on it.

Chad met Dat again later in the day at the weekly Buxton status report meeting. The meeting kicked off with a brief review of what had been accomplished during the past week. Discussion centered on the removal of elm trees. Alternative strategies for dealing with the city inspector, who had a reputation of being a stickler for details, were considered. The project was two weeks behind schedule, which is an important issue since it was imperative that the building be ready for students to move in at the 2008 fall term. The project was also on a very tight budget, and the management reserve had to be carefully administered. Renovation of existing buildings was always a bit of a gamble, since you never knew what you would find once you began tearing down walls. Fortunately, only small amounts of asbestos were found, but rot was much more severe than anticipated.

The meeting included a partnering assessment. The results of a Web survey filled out by all the principals were distributed. The results revealed a dip in the ratings between the Crawford foremen and university officials regarding timely collaboration and effective problem solving. One of Chad's people said that the primary source of frustration was Crawford foremen failing to respond to e-mail and telephone messages. Dat asked for the names of his people and said he would talk to each of them. The Crawford foremen complained that the university officials were being too nit-picky. “We don't have the time or money to do A+ work on everything,” argued a foreman. Chad told Dat and his people that he would talk to facilities guys and ask them to focus on what is really important.

6 MONTHS AGO

The project status report meeting started on time. Crawford had been able to make up for lost time, and it now looked like the building would open on time. Chad was glad to see that the partnering assessment had been positive and steady over the past month. The big issue was the surge in costs consuming all but $50,000 of management reserve. With six months to go everyone knew that this would not cover all the change orders needed to have the building ready. After all, there was already $24,000 worth of change orders pending.

Chad looked across the table and saw nothing but grim faces. Then one of the Crawford foremen proposed postponing treating all of the exterior walls. “Instead of cleaning and preserving the entire brick building, let's only do the front entrance and the North and South walls that the public sees. We can just refurbish the interior court walls as well as the West side. This would be adequate for at least eight years, in which time money should be available to complete the job.”

At first Chad didn't like this idea, but eventually he realized that this was the only way they could have the building ready for the students. Friendly arguments broke out over which exterior segments needed the full treatment and which ones didn't. The whole team ended up touring the outside of the building identifying what kind of work needed to be done. In the end, only 70 percent of exterior brick walls were reconditioned according to plan with a savings of over $250,000. While this boost to the reserve would still make things tight everyone felt that they now had a fighting chance to complete the project on time.

TODAY

As Chad mingled with a glass of champagne, no one talked about the walls that still needed to be refurbished—tonight was a night to celebrate. All of the major participants and their spouses were at the party, and the university was hosting a five-course meal at the top of the tower. During the toasts, jokes were exchanged and stories told about the ghosts in the west wing and the discovery of a dead skunk in the south basement. Everyone talked about how proud they felt about bringing back to life the grand old building. More than one person mentioned that this was much more satisfying than tearing down an old relic and constructing a new building. The president of the university concluded the festivities by thanking everyone for their hard work and proclaiming that Buxton would become a bright, shining icon for Pacifica State.

1. How successful was this project?

2. What best practices were evident in the case? How did they contribute to project objectives?l

Top of Form

Bottom of Form