



White paper

Warm bodies

Team dynamics and filling resource needs

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Warm bodies

Hiring “warm bodies” to staff a project is a bad idea. You can be certain that you’ll suffer a significant efficiency loss, for many of the reasons discussed below. If you happen to be a warm body on a project, you may see some of these issues firsthand. I have. I’ve been a nameless resource on a few projects, and this is what I observed.

First, when people who’ve never worked together get stuck on a new project together there is a sense of disorientation and loneliness. Many aspects of the project feel unfamiliar and a natural learning curve follows. Communication is not smooth. Team members don’t always know what others bring to the table, and are afraid to ask. If management discourages “idle talk” then members may never find out. They can miss out on skills that might otherwise be readily available to them. There is clearly a sense of isolation until the team gels.

People brought in as warm bodies, whose future is uncertain when the project is complete, often have a hard time engaging the vision for a project. They’ve got no upside potential to look forward to. Without a sense of purpose, people cannot rise to the challenge. They’ll do their work but without any real passion. Everyone needs something to look forward to, so the upside for these people usually comes from their own professional goals or companies they hope to build. That means they have no ownership in your project, no vested interest in the outcome, and no heart for it. Their passion lies elsewhere, and you become a means to an end for them - a means to build their own dreams. Rarely will they go above and beyond the call of duty, except for more money. Nobody articulates this, but it happens.

Beware of building a temporary team made up of resources like this. But if you do, be prepared to work with them on a personal level to overcome some of the natural issues they will face.

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