

What Makes a DXpedition Successful?

I believe the success of every DXpedition boils down to effective leadership, communications and operations planning, operator skill, generous donations and supplier involvement and most of all, a patient and understanding international DX community.

But sometimes, even if we have the right skills, there is just not enough time in a day to do everything you want to do prior to a quick trip. Our family, business and other high priority commitments always seem to get the most attention.

A DXpedition may be the byproduct of a family vacation or business trip to a full-scale 36 month planned event. Even the rarest of DXpeditions have occurred with minimum preparation and notice. Sometimes, we have to take the DXpedition as it presents itself — just be happy!

I remember back in June 1996, I was scheduled to take a business travel trip to the United Arab Emirates (A61). At that time, it was a difficult and delicate task trying to operate from the UAE. Trying to confirm it on CW was rare to the average DXer. After trying unsuccessfully to establish a contact in the UAE before departure, it was clear I would not get a chance to operate once there in Dubai or Abu Dhabi. With some persistence, my luck changed within a few days after arrival, yielding the chance to operate for two days.

Over 2,500 of the total 3,500 QSOs were made on CW using a straight hand key. I certainly wished I had taken the parallel keying cable for my laptop PC, but had fun anyway. I had no feeling in my two fingers used to support the hand key for a few days after the operation.

How is a DXpedition Judged?

With the use of the World Wide Web, the average DX or Contest operator has the ability to obtain real-time information regarding a DXpedition. The real-time communication comes in the form of packet spots, daily newsletters, radio club newsletters, reflectors and Web site infor-



Planning a DXpedition takes a lot of work.

mation, individual operator Web sites and e-mails, online logs, and most important, each operator listening to the DX station first hand.

These tools make the casual operator a critical judge of success. For others, it makes them the frequency cop. The rarer

the DX station, the less tolerant the audience becomes. We are now in an age where it has become expected that exotic DXpedition teams have real-time online logs and can be responsive to e-mails and correspondence on a daily if not by a minute to minute basis. Without identifying past



After a well planned and executed DXpedition, it's time to relax and enjoy the moment.

By David Collingham, K3LP

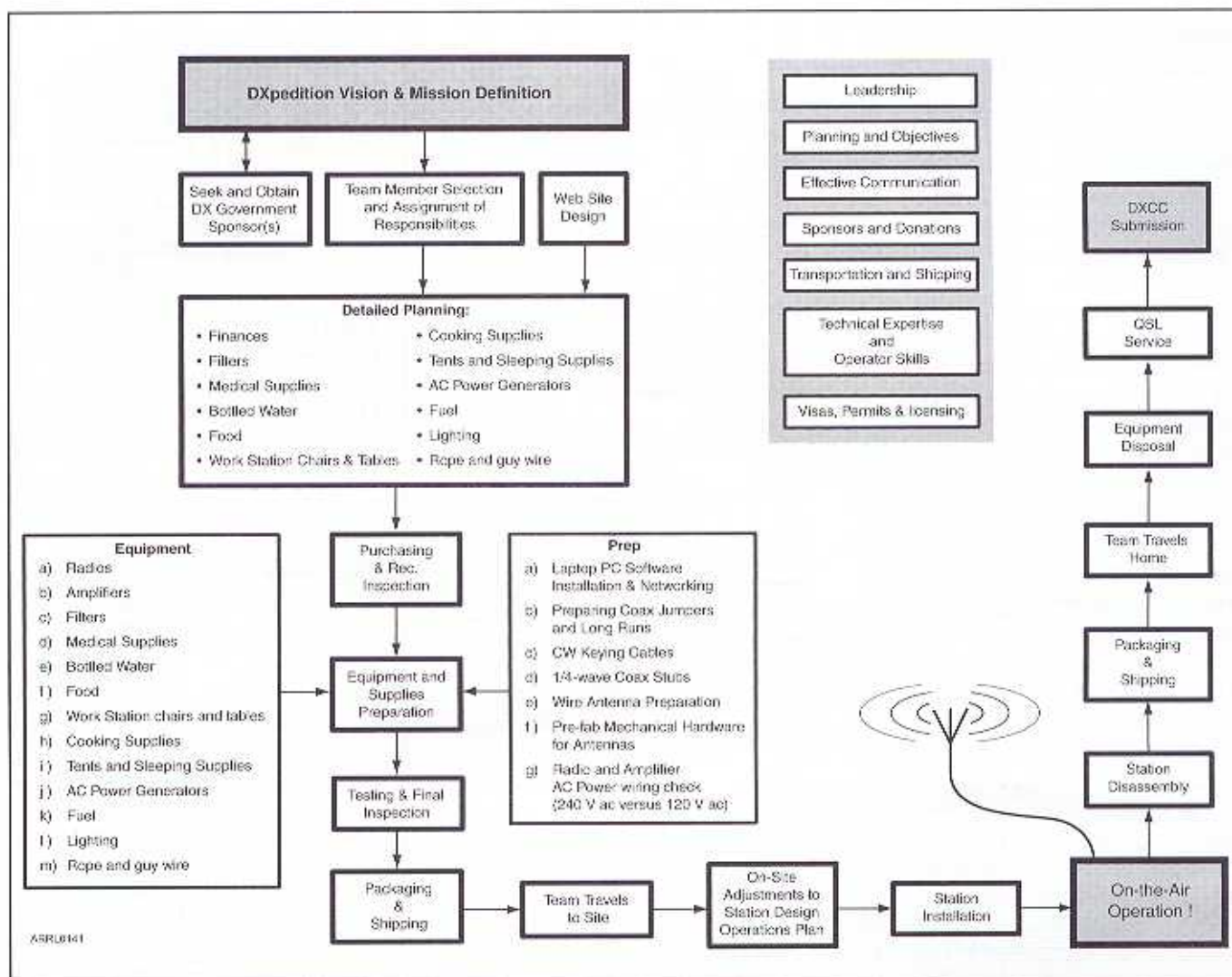


Figure 1 — Detailed DXpedition Process Flow.

perceived unsuccessful DXpeditions, you may quickly reflect on what you liked and did not like about the DXpedition.

Sometimes unfairly, we may judge the success of the DXpedition based on our personal hopes versus reality and without the knowledge of limitations invoked on the DXpedition by the sponsoring organization or country, travel, operating environment and physical constraints.

It seems that if people have negative comments regarding a DXpedition, the proper thing to do is to respond to them in private in a constructive way. Recently, I monitored a rare DXpedition on the air and it brought sadness to me to hear the lack of loyalty to our hobby and in some cases, ignorance. Let us remember there is a reason or two why the DX is so rare — it's incredible that the station is even on the air. Since we can't handpick the Who? What?

When? Where? we need to be as kind and supportive as possible to encourage present and future success.

What's the Perception and Reality of DXpedition Financial Support?

A DXpedition team's cost heading off on a rare DXpedition is extremely high and the DX community financial support in the way of donations can be hesitant or not forthcoming. Where would we be if not for the few loyal clubs or individuals that make contributions each and every time a DXpedition occurs? This lack of participation is hard to understand since the expectations of the DX community are 10 times more critical and less tolerant than ever.

Most teams have success in reducing equipment cost by getting manufacturer

loans or discounts (radios, antennas, amps, headsets, coax, etc). It is common for individual team members to pay for their own air travel, hotel, food, visas, medical shots, travel and medical insurance, permits and license expenses. Expenses such as a boat or helicopter ride, extra packaging and shipping of equipment and supplies, and good old-fashioned payments to sponsors or entities are paid from the cash received through donations. When donations do not cover the expenditures, the team members typically share in paying the remaining balance. On DXpeditions, it's not uncommon to hear team members say they spent \$20,000.00, \$10,000.00, \$5,000.00 or \$3,000.00 plus all their personal travel, hotel, food and any special equipment expenses.

Most people think if they put an SASE, S1 or 1 IRC in the QSL request envelope,

Table 1
Critical Success Factors — Scorecard

<i>Item</i>	<i>Measure:</i>	<i>Customer Satisfaction Score</i>
1	Leadership	—
2	Planning	—
3	Sponsors	—
4	Donations	—
5	Finances	—
6	Communications	—
7	Team Technical Expertise	—
8	Station Design & Installation	—
9	Antenna Design and Installation	—
10	IT Support Systems Infrastructure	—
11	Band, Mode & Time Management	—
12	Operator Skill Level	—
13	Suppliers	—
14	Logs and Records	—
15	QSL Services	—
16	Emergency Care	—
17	Team Work	—
18	Packaging & Shipping	—
19	Transportation	—
20	DXCC Approval	—
Total Score %:		—

Score Ranking:

- 4 – Excellent
- 3 – Above Average
- 2 – Average
- 1 – Below Average
- 0 – Unsatisfactory

they have made a major contribution. This type of investment typically just gets the QSL mail requests shipped. Though there are many opinions about QSLing as described in past articles, I would encourage operators to contribute using whatever means they can to support DXpeditions. It certainly excites the team when they open an envelope with a \$25, \$10 or \$5 donation. The money or contribution is a good investment and allows for hope of future DXpeditions.

I can only imagine the net loss on other major DXpeditions.

Measuring Success

Every elite DXpedition team has a mission that describes its purpose and specific objectives giving it direction and focus. The mission typically reflects the team leader's unique values and vision with adjustments made by team members. Achieving the mission takes the participation and skill of the entire team, its sponsors, donors and the ham radio community at large. The goals and objectives of every team member are aimed toward the mission. However, achieving goals and objectives of the team is not enough. The team must perform well in key areas on a consistent basis to achieve the mission. These

key areas — unique to the DXpedition team and the region in which it competes — can be defined as the team's critical success factors.

By identifying the Critical Success Factors, we can create a common point of reference or benchmark to help direct and measure the success of a DXpedition. I think it would be very interesting for a DXpedition to add an online Customer Satisfaction Survey to its Web site to obtain benchmark data from the DX community. I have listed in Table 1 what I feel are the DXpedition Critical Success Factors.

What's the Typical DXpedition Process?

Each DXpedition takes on the personality of its leader. Therefore, the communication style and manner in which planning is accomplished varies drastically. Myself, I prefer a very detailed and organized trip. I believe there is enough opportunity for things to go wrong even with the right level of planning. I dislike being on a trip without the right supplies. I would rather take more than what's expected than find out I don't have enough.

See Figure 1 — Detail DXpedition Process Flow for more information about planning a DXpedition.



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