



Effective Project Management

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Purpose of this article

This article describes effective project management. The article does not focus on tools. Instead it discusses the points which are imperative to Effective Project Management. The article is aimed at those who never under-estimate Project Management and are always on the look out for excellence. Each point below has many dimensions however not all dimensions are discussed here. I hope that, this article will help readers interested in project management.

Requirement Analysis

Generally, the project manager or requirements analyst gathers initial requirements from the client. He or she then starts developing the architecture/design etc. and creates a framework so that, the development team can start working. The important thing is that, it is essential that, requirements are checked with the client on a regular basis.

The requirements analyst / PM should keep on asking the client at each stage, if there are any changes in the requirements. What happens is that, when requirements changes, the client is not aware in advance. Hence, when the client comprehends that requirements are changing, he rushes to the contractor with a new sets of requirements.

This can also be towards the conclusion stage of the project and then, it becomes extremely difficult to complete the project on time. Then, there is no schedule or planning it just becomes fire fighting. Of course, the new requirements are fulfilled but with all kind of pain, delays and sacrifices by the team. In the end, all are happy but nobody thinks that there could have been a better way. Everybody thinks that, it was the fault of somebody else!

Good requirement analysts visit their clients, communicate and discuss their requirements in great depth. By doing so, many times, it becomes evident to the client that, he is missing something; he crosschecks and finds that there is more to the requirements. The shortcomings are identified well in advance and work becomes much smoother. The total effective time spent is much less compared to the earlier case.

Resource Management

A lot needs to be arranged before the start of a project and also during execution. Mostly PMs do this very well. Sometimes however, they miss on something such as, people getting sick, or leaving the job etc. Hence, the schedules suffer. This results in dissatisfaction from the client. The client is ready to accept that, people can be sick or, they can leave the job. What the client is not ready to accept is the effect of this on the project. Backups should always be provided in sufficient numbers to avoid such situations. Resource in terms of hardware or infrastructure is not discussed here as it is normally managed very well.

“What is many times seen is that, project managers do resource management activity very well but are not able to provide suitable attention to other activities or are not skilled enough to carry out other activities. Many think that, once the resource management is done, everything is done. People will do the rest. This is not true. Each area in project management has to be addressed amply.”

Process & Methodologies

There are advantages in having processes present to guide the development and execution activities in a structured manner. Many a time it is obvious that the person following the process does not know why he or she is following the particular process; they just do it so because his or her boss has told them to do it that way. At times, there are a bunch of processes that may not suit the needs but are there because someone wants to show that, they are following all the processes in the book. This is not the right approach. Employees are forced to follow processes whether applicable or not! What is required is that, process should help to save time and improve the quality but eventually, the reverse happens.

Knowledge Management

Everyone knows that, “Knowledge is spread by giving” but we are not inclined to pursue the same. We believe something else and do something else. A good PM ensures proper flow of knowledge and also encourages employee trainings to carry out the required job. Training should always be available for the latest technologies. This gives the company an upper hand from the perspective of the clients.

Risk Management

Risk management is a balancing act. It involves the cost calculation for various risks, prioritization of risks, taking appropriate steps and efforts to minimize the risks. If you do not handle them now, then you have to deal with them later, in a much bigger degree and spending more energy. A smart PM is one who decides to choose the first solution.

Budget

Neither lavish nor meagre budgets work. In today’s world, where high optimization is the way to go, one should not forget that, good investment helps to increase profitability.

People Management

People management is a vital feature to achieve sure success in project management. People working on projects are not routine workers. They have special skill sets. They should be handled with an improved understanding of the situation.

Avoiding conflicts in advance

The project manager typically addresses the conflicts, as and when they appear. A good PM always smells conflicts in advance and does not allow them to grow although no one can get complete rid of the conflicts. There are also positive conflicts that can bring greater efficiency in the way of working. The key to manage conflicts is to support the right attitudes with a good amount of competency.

Motivation for the Right Candidates

Good candidates should be motivated through increase in salaries, promotion, recognition, providing more challenges and backing the right cause. The project is the prime loser if the right candidate quits the job. Of course, the job will go on but no one can replace the same person in exactly the same way. Also the rich experience and maturity goes away. Management has to reinvest and rotate the wheel again. More money is lost in this process with loss of credibility.

Tracking People's satisfaction

The project manager cannot wait for the team member to come to him and pronounce that, he or she is not satisfied. A good team member is an asset to the project and thereby the organization. The PM should keep his or her eyes and ears open to track the satisfaction of team members otherwise, it builds negative thoughts in the mind of even a right member. The Project Manager is then no longer, a respected guy. People start working out of compulsion, and loose enthusiasm thereby, losing the quality and output, which can end with the member leaving the organization.

Assessing People's Delivery in Terms of Benefits brought to the Project

The ideal project manager will value the contribution of employees in many dimensions e.g. a candidate providing training to other team members, establishing superb relations with client, motivating others, taking the lead and bringing results, introducing and practicing the right procedures and ways of working, showing the way to others. If the PM overlooks these abilities and only concentrates on technical abilities of team members, he will be discouraging effective team members to benefit the project and thereby the PM.

Planning

A well-defined plan with facts and practical aspect to it is the key to success. Not all managers are good planners. Planning and executing are two different aspects. While planning, it is strongly recommended that, you consult people who are actually going to execute the plans, crosscheck with facts and calculate using a spice of practicality.

Planning should also consider the availability of good resources along with commitments to customers and the organization. If commitments to the customers are broken, whatever may be the reason, it becomes one cause for the client to move away from you. In the other case, even if there is pressure on the client, it will become extremely difficult for client to move away from a "High Quality Service Provider". Also cost factors should be considered and balanced. Planning should also take into account previous experience and best practices.

Sub-contract Management

This should be undertaken in the same spirit as you handle clients. Contractors should be identified keeping in mind their ability to perform, commitments, attitude etc. It is as if you are recruiting a competent member to carry out tasks in your own team.

One of the most important things to judge the sub contractor is their dedication to work. Also their orientation towards, quality, timeliness, budget and behaviour are equally important. Working in tandem with the sub contractor can yield great results. They should be provided with all the help and information they need to carry out the assigned contract. Treating them as a part of your team gives them motivation to perform better and stop them hiding things. They should feel free to come and

discuss their issues openly with you, which is a better way to handle critical situations. Getting their confidence is extremely important. Proper and realistic planning can be carried out and accomplished, if you are working effectively with sub-contractor.

Deadlines

Missing deadlines is a failure of planning and execution. It is a failure of a team to deliver. No excuses are sufficient (except natural calamities) to cover failures. What is important is the promise to the customer, and having a “Right on Target” attitude.

Client Communication

Effective communication is saying “Yes” to opportunities and “No” if there is no chance of delivery but suggesting an alternative “Win-Win” situation. Those who do not accept “Win-Win” situations are not worth doing business with in the long term. The client is always seeking a solution. Permanent solutions help you get a pat on your back and more high-end work. One should not get into trivial and repeated work unless it is impossible to give a permanent solution by enhancements and automation.

Communication techniques are not discussed here. What is discussed here is the basis of communication. The best communication is your work, your abilities, skills and most important your attitude. Regular timely information to the client is important in the same way. Conflicts with clients should be solved with patience explaining clearly the benefits for client. Nobody can deny the proposal where all seems to be a mixture of success. Not even your boss!!

Successful Team

Successful teams are generally led by bright, dynamic and mature leaders. Dull, lazy and immature leaders cannot create successful teams though sometimes, it looks that they are! Time always brings out the real situation. History shows that, many successful leaders of their time are not considered as Great leaders today. Others proved to be inspiration for millions. Definitely it is a team who makes the success. Without a true leader, it can never achieve it.

Today, what we lack most are the right leaders!! A true leader not only fights for his or her position. He or she has a major concern about people working with him. He or she brings prosperity for many, organizations and the country. He or she creates successful career path for many. He or she shows the right way to go.

About the Author

The author is currently working as a Project Manager in a company known as, Case Consulting Group in Mumbai. He has worked at client sites to ensure a successful go-live for many projects. He has also lead a team to achieve the set goals and has experience in both, software and hard-core industries. Sandeep has also seen projects suffering due to lack of good management skills.

Project Perfect is a project management software consulting and training organisation based in Sydney Australia. Their focus is to provide creative yet pragmatic solutions to Project Management issues.

Project Perfect sell “Project Administrator” software, which is a tool to assist organisations better manage project risks, issues, budgets, scope, documentation planning and scheduling. They also created a technique for gathering requirements called “Method H”™, and sell software to support the technique. For more information on Project tools or Project Management visit www.projectperfect.com.au