

The Task of a Project Manager in Building Individual and Project Team Capability in Modern Day Project Work

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I. INTRODUCTION

Projects create productive assets. It is only through projects resources are converted into productive assets. Since projects convert resources that lie idle into productive assets, projects act as prime movers of economic development of any country. In the process of creating productive assets, projects optimize the process of resource allocation. Since projects can be successfully completed only with a focused attention on goals by the project team members, projects create an environment for participatory endeavours. Project Management Institute (PMI) commissioned a comprehensive research study to assess the project leadership style as a success factor on project performance (Turner and Müller, 2005). Turner and Müller—after reviewing general management literature on leadership starting from Confucius (500 BC) and Barnard (1938) to Dulewicz and Higgs (2003)—noted, based on several research studies, that leadership style and competence are key success factors to a manager’s business performance; however, they did not find such correlation in the project management literature. Nonetheless, Turner and Müller suggested that different project leadership styles are appropriate at different stages of the project life cycle, and the project manager has a leadership role in creating an effective working environment for the project team.

From the point of view of an organization, projects act as a means for consolidating the experience and expertise of the organizational members effectively, create learning environment, encourage team-spirit and help to achieve organizational objectives (Nagarajan, 2012). Business becoming more and more competitive, the focus of organizations shift towards ensuring customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by cutting down costs, improving quality, improving product features and ensuring timely delivery. Though mass-production has its advantages in terms of cost reduction, when every player in the field switches over to mass-production has its advantages in terms of cost reduction, the cost differences between organizations get narrowed down. To win over the situation, there needs to be a shift towards custom production of products and services to meet the specific customer requirements of different sector of customers. Such a situation will necessarily require a team-based approach to issues where in ‘project management’ becomes the only option. Factory automation and office automation cuts down the lengthy organizational hierarchy and reduces the need for middle management and supervisory staff considerably. Instead, employees are assigned with more and more of specific problems like improving product features, designing new products, finding out cost-effective techniques of production etc. All such specific time-bound issues can be effectively handled only by project based organizations. As an organization starts handling more of projects (which are necessitated by the changing business scenario as explained above), the bureaucratic organizational set up where project teams will be formed to execute specific projects; once the project execution is over, the team will be dissolved and a fresh team will be formed to handle a new project and so on. Thus, handling organizational activities as a combination of many projects have come to stay.

II. LITERATURE

A. The Modern Day Projects

The modern day project management practices, while still not perfect, are being employed to create change through the efficient use of resources to deliver predetermined benefits. Project management theory and practice continues to be refined toward a purpose of managing change to achieve positive control over resource consumption to achieve desired objectives. New tools, primarily computer software, have brought forth the means to better manage projects from initiation through delivery of benefits. Senior managers in many organizations are familiar with the promise of project management as the most effective means of performing unique work to convert resources to new projects, service, or organizational change. A significant number of individuals from a variety of professions are becoming more involved in project management practices and they are learning to employ project management techniques to achieve the desired results. The professionals seeing to use project management in their workplace include engineers, architects, physicians, and nurses to name a few. The level of interest and emphasis in project management may be realized by the growth of professional associations. The Project Management Institute, headquartered in the United States, has experienced rapid growth in the past 5 years to now total more than 230,000

members. The International Project Management Association, headquartered in Switzerland, has 40 member associations with a total membership exceeding 100,000 individuals. The Japanese Project Management Forum, headquartered in Tokyo, has about 5,000 members (Cleland & Ireland, 2007). The Institute of Project Management Professionals, headquartered in Ghana also has over 200 members with few years of being in existence and is growing. There is an effort for a limited number of organizations to assess their maturity of project management, both from a practice perspective and from the knowledge and skills possessed by their project managers. Tools and methodologies play a major role in organizational maturity in the field of project management. Certification programs for project management personnel continue to expand and more individuals are seeking validation of their qualifications. It is estimated that more than 100,000 individuals have demonstrated their knowledge or competence in project management through a certification program (Cleland & Ireland, 2007).

B. Building Individual and Team Capability as a Project Manager

Project managers have many tools at their disposal for developing individuals and teams. Many of the methods can be used together and reinforce each other. Seven methods that many project managers find useful are as follows:

C. Exhibit Personal leadership

In an organizational context, leaders have the task of communicating the vision and mission of the company to its people, bringing the company to its final destination. Broadly speaking, organizational leaders fulfill three major roles (Carpenter and Sanders, 2009): interpersonal, informational, and decisional. A good way for project managers to build the capability of their team is to start by being an effective leader (Kloppenborg, 2012). Leading by examples gives team members a model to follow. A project manager led by balancing the demands of the parent organization, the project, and the team members. In this context, the project manager is a team member but one who treats both herself and all of the other team members in a respectful manner.

D. Make use of Project Management Tools

Project managers can use project management tools to give their team focus. For example, the charter gets a team started quickly. The WBS, schedule and other project management tools each help to focus the team in specific ways. Teams need to work toward specific goals.

E. Demand Situational Leadership

Depending on the team's initial capability, a project manager may need to start as a strong individual leader, but the goal is certainly to develop multiple leaders on the project team. In fact, in a great project team, leadership is situational. That is, each member may have both a leadership role in certain circumstances and followership roles in other situation. Where a junior team member has specific knowledge, he or she should ensure that everyone understands the situation. Even a junior team member is often expected to lead in certain situations.

F. Build a Desirable Team Identity

Another way to build team capacity is to create a desirable team identity. Frequently, the project manager and sponsor start thinking about this even before they recruit the first team members. People want to be associated with a winner. If people believe that a project is vital to the organization and that work is professionally stimulating, they want to be part of the team. Depending on the organization, some teams give detailed thought to the project name and "brand."

G. Teach Personal Responsibility

Project work packages and associated tasks require people from multiple disciplines working with a high degree of coordination to accomplish a task within project constraints. Because project management employs a multidisciplinary approach, it needs people from different functions. Each person brings specific expertise and experience to the project team (Gray and Larson, 2005), which contributes to making the team a complex and challenging entity to manage. Project team members need to understand they all have three responsibilities. The first is to complete their individual work on time, on budget, and correctly. Second is to complete their joint work responsibilities with teammates on time, on budget, and correctly. Third, each team member is also responsible for improving work methods. Each needs to improve his or her personal work with the team to jointly improve the project team's capabilities.

H. Develop Understanding and Respect

Project team needs to develop understanding of and trust in each other if they want to develop capability as a team. Understanding others starts with understanding oneself. A self-aware individual is more effective in establishing relationships by better appreciating and valuing the contributions of others and being willing to learn from them.

III. CONCLUSION

Projects are usually unique and often are associated with unknowns, complexity, and uncertainty. Obviously, a project manager's role is more challenging than that of a typical, functional manager. In addition to working across functional and organizational environments, traditionally designed to support functional managers, the project manager has other challenges such as providing leadership without documented, formal authority, and working in matrix organizations where unity of command is an issue (Cleland, 1995). Consequently, project managers are perceived to be leading a diverse set of people with little direct control over the team members (Cleland and Ireland, 2002).

Trust encourages project team members to collaborate, network, and innovate. Ring (1996) analyzed trust at the interpersonal level and found it a precursor to forming ongoing networks. Although it should evolve mutually, trust is more important for leaders as they try to motivate others to accomplish a vision and achieve project goals. By establishing trust, leaders can manage changes and mitigate conflicts, a deterrent to project performance and transforming project stakeholders into a cohesive project team.

Because people are motivated by challenges and opportunities to further their career goals, those who are assigned to project teams are almost always interested in accomplishing personal and professional goals in addition to completing their project responsibilities. This means that project managers should understand the personal aspirations of their project team members and support them in their aspirations. As leaders, project managers play an important role in motivating and guiding people to simultaneously grow as professionals and complete their project responsibilities.

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