



Module: Business Processes

Unit: Good Practice in the Project Cycle

Lesson: The Project Manager

© 2012 Resource Development International Ltd. All rights reserved.

Resource Development International Limited reserves all rights of copyright and all other intellectual property rights in these learning materials. No part of any learning materials may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, including without limitation electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written consent of Resource Development International Limited.

The Project Manager

Introduction

In this lesson we shall look at project management skills.

Given the high focus on project management in business today, we need to understand the key skills and knowledge required of the Project Manager (PM). We also need to address the questions - what are the roles and responsibilities of the PM and what is the authority of the PM?

Project Management Skills

The PM is the person assigned to manage a specific project and has overall responsibility for ensuring the project meets its objectives.

General management skills provide a good basis for a PM, but there are some additional skills that are essential. A PM must be :

- A leader
- Possess drive
- Assertive
- Innovative and creative
- A good communicator
- A participative problem solver
- An effective negotiator
- A team builder and facilitator
- Respected and politically aware
- Goal and success oriented

Let us examine some of these characteristics further.

Leadership: As a leader the PM must be able to establish direction and align team members on common project goals. The PM must be motivating, inspiring and decisive. A good leader will also be sensitive to people and situations.

Drive: A good PM must possess enormous drive. The PM must have a strong sense of urgency in pursuing work efforts, and be enthusiastic and highly motivated. The PM must also be able to impart this drive to team members - by encouraging team members to be goal-oriented.

Communication ability: Good communication ability is vital for the success of a PM. Communications involves communications with team members, customers, management and functional managers. Communication ability includes written, oral, listening and speaking.]

Respected and politically aware: The PM must be respected and politically aware. The PM should be well respected amongst team members, peers and management, and establish and maintain positive and constructive relationships. The PM must also maintain a sensitivity to personal and organisational relationships that may have ramifications for the project

Problem solving ability: The PM must possess good problem solving skills. He/she must be able to apply a systematic approach to resolving issues and handling conflicting and complex information. But problem solving skills must also be participative. This refers to the ability of the PM to solicit and apply the ideas and knowledge of team members.

Team building and Facilitation skills: Another vital quality is team building and facilitation. The PM must be able to develop teamwork and encourage collaborative and co-operative work on the part of team members. The PM must also be able to coach and develop team members and delegate appropriately.

think about it

Identify the best PM you have worked for, on a project that was successful. What skills and qualities did the PM Project Manager possess? How do they compare with the skills we have just identified?

Specific Project Management Skills

In addition to the skills identified, skills and competences are required to undertake specific project management tasks such as :

- Defining project scope
- Defining the breakdown of work
- Integrating activities
- Managing changes
- Activity planning and sequencing
- Resource planning
- Estimating work effort

- Estimating costs
- Developing a budget
- Managing risks
- Managing quality
- Managing the team
- Reporting
- Ensuring document management
- Managing customer/sponsor relationship

group learning activity

Select three of the tasks from the list above; identify the underlying skills and competences needed by a PM to carry them out effectively. Post your answers at the Group Learning Space on ilearn.

For projects that are technical in nature (e.g. IT systems project), the PM must also have skills in the technical areas of the project. This is especially important in the integration aspects of the project, when an understanding of the technical issues greatly enhances the success of the project.

The nature of project management is such that problems will always be encountered - some minor and some major. The difference between a good and a weak PM is dependent on how well he/she foresees and anticipates problems and proactively manages them, escalating issues to senior management where necessary. The proactive management of project problems/issues is greatly enhanced when the project is conducted in an environment of openness and mutual trust; to this end responsibility, accountability and authority are also the essential marks of a good PM.

Responsibility

The PM has ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the project and must be seen to be taking ultimate responsibility. Responsibility clearly does not mean that the PM undertakes all of the work and delegation is an important project skill. This involves trust but it also requires pro-active, formal tracking of progress. In an environment of trust, problems are highlighted early and corrective action can be taken to keep the project on course.

Accountability

Accountability is related to responsibility. The PM is ultimately accountable for the success of the project. However, just as responsibility is cascaded to the project team, accountability is also cascaded to responsible team members. High performance project teams foster an attitude of trust where accountability is assumed by various team members.

Authority

The PM is the operational authority for the project. When senior management need to know status, client issues etc, it is the PM who is consulted, as the authority on the day-to-day running of the project. However, research has shown when authority is appropriately cascaded down to the team, motivation and commitment increase resulting in higher project performance. But authority must clearly go hand in hand with responsibility. Good project management practice stipulates that responsibilities and authority are clearly assigned at the beginning of the project, and any subsequent changes be formally communicated to all members of the team.

The PM's role encompasses:

Planning the project

Planning involves both the planning of project management activities (e.g. project reviews, project reporting etc) as well as technical activities (e.g. technical reviews, quality assurance, estimating of technical activities etc).

Organising the project

Organising the project involves:

- Assembling a team with the right knowledge, skills and experience to carry out the activities of the project.
- Developing project plans and control procedures by which the project will be controlled.
- Setting up systems to document the project, and communicate with the stakeholders.

Managing the project to the client and project sponsor satisfaction

Managing the project to client and project sponsor satisfaction to the project constraints of scope/specification, schedule and cost. These triple constraints are referred to as the project baselines. One can say that the principle role of the PM is to manage the baselines to the satisfaction of the client and project sponsor.

Directing the Project

Directing the project is:

- tracking technical performance
- tracking financial performance
- tracking schedule performance
- tracking team member performance
- tracking sub-contractor performance
- controlling scope
- managing risks
- resolving project issues and problems
- building and maintaining team morale
- ensuring customer satisfaction

You should now conclude your reading for this module by looking at chapter 2 of Lewis (2007)