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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Effective project management facilitates the smooth running of horizontally oriented work in organizations that are traditionally vertically oriented. Projects require the co-operation of line managers both across the departments involved and throughout the various levels of seniority.

In large scale projects, an almost entirely self-contained project team can be created, either by assigning line staff to the project on a full-time basis or by hiring in external resources. Often a combination of both is used but in either case, because the project staff are essentially full-time, the conflicts between line and project management are minimized.

In these situations the project team member has only one boss, the project manager. Even in these large self-contained projects, it is likely that there will be a requirement for some resources that are outside of their control. The very fact that the project is used to operating in isolation, may accentuate any communication problems that then arise.

However, it is more typical for projects to use staff and other resources that remain under the control of a departmental or line manager. This type of project environment raises both the opportunities and potential hazards of integrating line and project management. The challenge is to create an environment that fosters cooperation and not one that breeds counter-productive competition.

Characteristics

Projects normally require key resources, which are not under the direct control of the project manager. The project manager will therefore need to negotiate with the relevant line manager to borrow and control these resources as and when they are required.

The cooperation of line managers is essential for the success of the project and project management staff should work hard at developing a good working relationship with them. The staff assigned to the project will often be reporting to two bosses - their line manager and the project manager; it is important that their position is clear at all times.

Effective project management is characterized by the following:

1. Clear leadership and direction
2. Seamless integration of new members into the team
3. Ability to communicate clearly
4. Arbitration skills when problem solving
5. Ability to handle interpersonal conflicts
6. Capability to plan and secure commitments

Project management staff should have the proven ability to assimilate and prioritize individual demands to make effective decisions. Conflict is a common occurrence in a project environment and project management staff should be skilled in conflict resolution. They will be judged heavily on their personal experience and the credibility that they already possess within the organization.

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Keeping Sight of the Goal

Project based working involves the efforts of a group of people dedicated to achieving a specific goal. A series of factors will contribute to the success of the project:

1. The appointment of project leaders at all levels who are committed to the project and respected by the team.
2. A shared belief in what the team is trying to achieve and a constant focus on the goals.
3. A willingness to negotiate with those outside of the team for the benefit of the project.

The single most important factor in determining the success of the team is constant referral to the question "What are we trying to achieve?" It is all too easy for project teams to lose sight of the overall aim of the project.

Is it a Single Project?

Every project should be placed under the overall control of a single project manager. Large or complex projects may well be divided into a number of sub-projects and sub-project managers can then be used to control them.

The division of a project into sub-projects is the responsibility of the project owner, who should work closely with the overall project manager when determining this. Sub-projects are often defined in terms of discrete areas of work, which can be allocated to sub-project managers with relevant expertise. The use of sub-project managers enables a wide variety of management structures to be imposed on any given project.

This series of courses share a common theme of being based on project scenarios that justify division into sub-projects. However, projects are often smaller and more straightforward, making this sub-division unnecessary. Where this is the case, all responsibilities assigned to the sub-project manager should be undertaken by the project manager themselves, who may then decide to delegate some of these to task leaders.

It is important not to make the organization of your project more complicated than necessary. You should apply the organizational framework detailed in this course in as streamlined a way as your project allows.

The 3 Main Roles?

There are three major project management roles: the project manager, sub-project manager and task leader. The appointment of any or all of these positions should be made entirely with reference to the needs of the project. In the smallest of projects both the roles and responsibilities of all three of these roles could be undertaken by a single project manager

Even though all three roles could be combined within one individual the demands placed on this individual may still not justify a full-time position. At the other extreme some projects can be enormous in scope, complexity and duration. The building of the Channel Tunnel, as one of the largest civil engineering projects in history, involved scores of project management staff, covering all three of the roles outlined.

The Channel Tunnel results were by no means atypical of such large scale and complex projects. Despite the bringing together of the best engineers, designers and project management experts available the project did suffer from significant delays and a significant overspend.

The inescapable conclusion is that to maximize the opportunities for success, projects and

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their corresponding management structures, should be run by staff who have gained experience in projects of a similar size and nature.

The Matrix Management Approach

When calling on a variety of resources, often from various departments, projects are operating in a matrix management environment. This is a descriptive term for the management environment where projects cut across organizational boundaries and involve staff who are required to report to their own line manager as well as to the project manager.

This is not a radical departure from traditional hierarchical management; indeed the traditional vertical management structure is still in place but is enhanced by temporary horizontal structures representing each project.

Matrix Management Needs Effective Communication

Matrix management relies on cooperation and communication between everyone involved. Whilst in a pure project environment, the decision-making authority rests with the project manager; in a matrix environment all major decisions will be reached by consensus.

A satisfactory working arrangement needs to be reached that bridges the inevitable differences in priority that will exist between project managers and line managers. Project managers will tend to view their own project as the focal point whereas departmental managers will tend to view things from a departmental perspective.

To function effectively matrix management environments should have the following characteristics:

1. There should be effective channels of communication between the managers involved.
2. All of the relevant line managers should contribute to project planning and resourcing decisions should be reached by consensus.
3. There should be formal procedures in place for resolving any management conflicts that do arise.
4. Project staff should feel committed to the project as well as to their own department.

In an ideal world the project manager would have little more to do than plan the project, secure the agreement of the line managers to deliver their pieces of the jigsaw on time and within budget, and then sit back and let it all happen. The real world is usually very different.

Matrix management relies on cooperation and communication between project and line managers, as all major decisions are necessarily reached by consensus.

To function effectively, matrix management environments should incorporate effective channels of communication as well as formal procedures for resolving any management conflicts that arise.

Sources of Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable consequence of project-based working. Therefore, it is important to understand the effects on staff morale, when project-based working is introduced.

Regardless of how well planned a project may be, it will be subject to unforeseen demands and the direction of the project may need to change as it progresses. Conflict often arises

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from decisions that inconvenience people, but are nevertheless essential to the success of the project.

Unforeseen changes in priority may result in conflict both within the project environment and between the project and the external departments that will be most effected by a change in project emphasis.

If a project falls behind the plan then there is likely to be conflict between the project and external departments who will then be expected to extend their commitment of personnel to it.

Technical conflicts are common where a department is supporting the project in a technical capacity. The project manager may reject the solution preferred by the department on technical, cost or scheduling grounds.

The administrative procedures in use on the project may be unfamiliar to some of the external departments effected.

Personality conflicts often manifest themselves as one of the earlier types of conflict already highlighted. This often makes them difficult to identify and therefore they can be very difficult to resolve.

The project manager will often try to minimize each external departments billing to the project. Conversely, the departmental managers will often try to secure as much of the projects budget as possible.

Conflict is an inevitable consequence of project work, where there is constant pressure to achieve targets within strict time and resource constraints.

Staff Concerns

When introducing project working into an organization a variety of issues may cause concern to members of staff, especially those who are requested to work on the first projects that are implemented.

It is common for staff involved in project work to be concerned about the extent to which the efforts they expend on project related work will be recognized. This problem may be compounded if they feel their project related work will not be acknowledged and recognized within their own department.

Staff may feel that their personal rewards may be jeopardized by undertaking project related work. They may feel that however hard they work on the project it will not effect their chances of advancement or promotion within their department.

Staff may be concerned that the project itself may not be an outstanding success and that any perceived failure on its part will reflect badly on the individual staff involved with it.

Staff involved with projects may have long term worries about what happens to them at the end of the project. Perhaps their department will learn to cope without them; or even worse it may have developed new procedures whilst they were otherwise occupied.

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Projects are all about utilizing existing resources and expertise in an efficient and effective way to get things done. The downside of this, from a staff perspective, may be that projects are not seen as training oriented environments in which to develop personal skills.

This concern is primarily an issue with staff seconded to projects on a full time basis. They may feel increasingly isolated and left behind in relation to their long time colleagues and the departmental practices with which they are familiar.

Many of these issues may be complicated further if staff are working on more than one project at a time. Personnel assigned to a project should be totally clear about the management structures, which affect them on a day-to-day basis.

This tutorial is an excerpt from the GetAhead in Project Management Skills course.

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