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Project Management

BT353E

Midterm

**Short Answers**

1) *The project manager meets with the project team to review lessons learned from previous projects. Why is this important and what actions should follow?*

One of the largest reasons projects fail is because teams and individuals fair to learn from past mistakes. These mistakes might have been made by past teams, or by their own team in the past. In a meeting specifically put together to reflect on past lessons, a project leader should be prepared with straightforward, concise examples of both things that went well and things that went poorly. This will help the team understand what kinds of behavior to emulate, and what behaviors to avoid. In a more context sensitive way, these meetings may help certain members of the project shape technical details needed to proceed; if a similar project failed in the past, it is important to look at the particular reasons it did and how to avoid them. For example, if a carnival had been run a few years ago in a certain location, but performed poorly because the team did not account for how much parking they would need to accommodate their intended clientele, any future carnivals held at the same place would need to take extra steps to make sure something like that did not happen again.

2) *Being recently assigned as a project manager, you noticed during the project execution meetings that conflicts have surfaced in the team on both technical and interpersonal levels. What is an appropriate way of handling these conflicts?*

Managing technical and interpersonal conflicts is one of the hardest yet most important jobs a leader has. The first thing they have to do is get as much information regarding any given problem from all present sides. This can involve calling private, one-on-one meetings with various members of the projects to ask for details regarding the issues from their perspective. Once the leader has heard all sides of a problem, it then falls to them to work and find compromises or otherwise resolve the compromise. This can be done either by working to change a conflicting behavior or by making an executive decision regarding a technical detail of the project. While some conflicts may seem very insurmountable, working past them for the success of a project is a difficult but necessary part of a Project Leader’s job.

3) *How should change management be planned for and managed including “scope creep” in the project management process?*

Key Performance Indicators, or KPIs, are incredibly vital to a project’s success and smooth management. These must be established at the beginning of a project’s life cycle, and must be stuck to in most circumstances. These KPIs can be used as a defense of sorts against scope creep; if adding a new feature will cut into a KPI, that feature’s relevance and importance should be seriously questioned. When a sponsor comes asking for a larger scope, your KPIs will help offer simple, concise ways that adding those features will affect the overall progress of the project. For example, adding new features may make finishing a beta of a program impossible on the timetable originally planned. The sponsor will then need to be willing to give the team more time to work on it, or must be willing to strip the requested feature, or other features, from the project.

4) *Why should a project manager NOT begin a project without an approved project charter? What are the key components in an effective Charter and why are they important?*

Project charters are invaluable in establishing accountability, and for helping everybody on a project understand what they are responsible for. The charter should provide dates on deliverables, each team member’s role and deadlines, and an overall mission statement. These things are not only helpful to the project team, but they are also helpful as they are great things to have prepared to present to a panel of investors, or any sort of sponsor behind a project. Starting a project without a charter is simply begging for disaster; without a written record of who is expected to what by what time, nobody feels organized and deadlines will usually be missed. Team members will easily be able to shift blame away from themselves by blaming somebody else, or by claiming they did not know when something had to be done by. Clearly and concisely laying down the rules and expectations of each project member is necessary to smooth operation, and helps mitigate the risk of total project failure.

**Reflective Questions**

1) *Rewarding a team member for a job well done or promoting an outstanding employee is easy. Counseling a poor performing employee, addressing a sensitive issue with a peer or trying to find a solution amongst two conflicting project team members is not. The reality is no matter how uncomfortable these conversations can be, we all can relate to being found in them as leaders. The outcome of the difficult conversation all depends on how you handle the discussion. How would you approach this type of conversation? What are some the steps you will follow to ensure a constructive outcome?*

An important thing to remember when dealing with people, is that they tend to act a certain way for a specific reason. When told that a specific coworker is behaving inappropriately or rudely and has no redeeming qualities, it is important to keep in mind that, while they may be currently detrimental in their workplace, that they must be acting the way they are for a specific reason. Perhaps it’s because they think they are being helpful by adding their two cents on an issue, or that they were treated poorly in the past. Regardless of the reason, negative behavior must be dealt with but with the mindset that the person is capable of being reasonable and changing due to demands. If that begins to prove to be untrue, that is when more extreme measures, such as removing a member from a project, should be considered.

In the case of a poor performing employee, a one-on-one meeting with them should be pursued after reviewing their contributions to a given project. Finding specific examples of times that they have underperformed is key to not completely destroying morale. Discussing an employee’s performance in a non-threatening manner will yield better results than an aggressive or oppressive approach; they may not be aware that they are underperforming and may be completely capable of stepping up where they are needed. Potential bonuses may be used as incentives to get ahead of schedule. On the other hand, employees who refuse to change their performance, and continue to underperform should be placed under high scrutiny, with their removal left as an available option.

Addressing sensitive issues with peers is incredibly challenging. These may stem from home problems or from personal flaws, and in some cases it really is not the place of an employer to bring them up. However, concern for a coworker’s wellbeing is generally not frowned upon, and gently pressing issues that may be causing problems in the workplace is acceptable. Again, a non-threatening approach works best in these kinds of scenarios, as people are much less inclined to participate in productive discussion when they feel threatened, demeaned, or otherwise offended. In some cases it may impossible to hold these conversations without offending somebody, but the conversation may still be necessary. While it will be difficult, these situations are ones that project leaders must be prepared for and willing to participate in, to yield better outcomes for their entire team.

Conflicts between multiple team leaders are some of the most frequently found problems in any kind of project, and can be potentially fatal for projects on a strict schedule or with a demanding workload. Resolving these as quickly and peacefully as possible is necessary for a project leader to maintain a grip on a given project. Learning both sides of a problem is key to understanding a given issue, and learning about the problem from objective third parties on the team not directly involved in the conflict can prove very useful in the long run. Scheduling one-on-one meetings with each conflicting party is also very important. This will help you learn about the grievances either side has, and will let you form your own opinion on the matter. From there, there are multiple ways to end the conflict. The leader, with this newfound information, may simply come to an executive decision regarding the issue and lay it down as their final answer; it may simply say one side is right, which will almost definitely lower morale and lead to problems down the line, or it will work to help settle each side’s differences in some sort of compromise. The solution will vary depending on whether or not the given issue is technical or personal in nature, but in general it is important to treat all sides respectfully and find some way to resolve the issue with as minimal an impact to the project as possible.

These situations prove very difficult to deal with for even the best project leaders. People are very complicated and may not always agree with each other, but it is the leader’s job to help them sort out their differences for the sake of their project’s success. A good project leader is a great people person, and it able to navigate through complicated social situations resolving conflicts as they arise. Managing social situations is one of the hardest but most important jobs a project leader has; remembering to maintain an atmosphere of respect and compromise is key to running a project smoothly and efficiently.

2) *You have been selected by the firm’s CEO to lead a critical project team. This project has significant risk and visibility. You have been given some latitude to staff the project team. What will be your strategy and approach? What organizational factors will you consider? What individual factors will you consider? How will you select team members?*

After evaluating the demands of the project I would start by writing a document, perhaps the beginnings of a project charter, detailing the specific goal of the project and relevant milestones which have specified deadlines. These milestones, essentially Key Performance Indicators, would need to be in place from the very beginning for several reasons. Ensuring that I, the project leader, have a strong grasp on the actual requirements of the project, will enable me to stop scope creep in its tracks, using the KPIs as a way to make any member or sponsor proposing additions to the project aware of the consequences of those suggestions. Having this information compiled and ready to go will make answering any potential questions about the project much easier, and will provide a simple platform on which to pick and inform project members.

Projects tend to need members from many departments of a company, so I may start this search my sending out an email to various managers in other departments I may not be familiar with, explaining the situation and that I need a qualified member from their department. If I happen to know about specific capable people beforehand, I may reach out to them directly; if not, other departments’ managers should be able to assist in the search for a qualified team. Depending on the size of the team and the scope of the project, a hierarchy of authority may be implemented, dividing the team into groups which all have a leader, who then would report to me. All of this would be detailed ahead of time in a project charter, which would be completed once members had signed on. They would be made aware of what expectations are placed on them, which would include things like relevant deadlines, outlines of the actual work they needed to do, a description of their skillset, available contact information, and any other relevant information that would be important to them as a project member or to me as their leader. In addition, the charter would remind every member of any sort of hierarchy implemented in the project, which would include contact information for whoever they would be reporting to. By making all of this information public at the beginning of the project, the members should all understand how things are supposed to work and how the team is organized, which should help handle organization overall.

Upon receiving lists of potential members from managers across various apartments, I would look into each suggested member’s record with the company, and their skillset. This would help eliminate some people who may not be the right fit for the project at hand, or those who may not be as qualified as I thought. Once a list of names has been compiled and less qualified names had been eliminated, a series of short, one-on-one interviews would be necessary to ensure that the people chosen are not only qualified but are available and willing to invest time into the project, beyond what they were working on elsewhere. This should help mitigate some problems individual factors may have otherwise caused. These interviews would heavily lean on the established charter draft, which would be able to answer most, if not all, questions they may have about the project. By signing it they would acknowledge that they are willing to put forward the effort and time to meet their specific deadlines, and help the project succeed in the long run.

By working with other managers and having a wealth of available information on hand, organizing and starting an important project should go fairly smoothly. So long as all relevant information is kept widely available to the members who need it, and as long as the project charter is concise enough, most common individual and organization problems that cause almost 70% of projects to fail. While no plan is foolproof, I believe this plan is a good way to improve your project’s chances of landing in that successful 30%.