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Reflections

**Classes of 8/28 & 30**

During the first week of class, we were informed about what Project Management as a course has to offer and how it will be useful to us in our future careers. We were given a clear scope of what to expect from the course and what would be upcoming soon, mostly in the form of weekly reflections and long-term projects over the course of the semester. Later in the week we delved into more of the specifics of the course and what each long-term project would be about and how we would go about completing them. During this week, I found that the clarity of what to expect from the course was refreshing and reassured me that this course would have useful things to offer that are organized and regimented. Furthermore, I was surprised by my own interest in the material and started to think about how I could use the information taught in this course for my own career and how it could benefit me. The biggest takeaway this week for me personally was the importance of having a timeline for one’s project and the importance of sticking to that timeline to ensure the progress of the project. Another point that stayed with me was the fact that many bosses or leaders in companies fail to realize that most employees stay with their current employer for only a few years before moving on when better opportunities arise, and the importance of preparing for when these employees move on. I found that much of what is offered in this course could greatly influence my professional life, especially the knowledge that I may be working overseas and for many different companies throughout my career as was emphasized many times.

**Classes of 9/4**

During this week, we focused on the reasons for project failure and success. Going through the reasons for project failure was interesting to me because despite the existences of the statistics and reasons why projects fail, many projects still fail with all the knowledge available to them as to why projects fail and succeed. To be sure, it is not usually as clean cut as just making sure your team does not do what makes projects fail and only do what makes projects succeed generally. The reasons why projects fail are usually quite situational and personal to each project, but in terms of keeping employees on track and teams communicating I feel that much improvement is needed for many companies. This improvement could amount to measurable success with the project and serve as an example for other project teams or even other companies, and it is surprising that companies and project leaders still struggle with essentials like communication.

One of the bigger takeaways from this week’s session’s is that no matter what, projects are likely to have many mistakes and miscalculations involved, and there is no use in focusing on being completely perfect. Of course, teams should strive to be as close to perfect as possible, but it should not be the main goal as the goal is to finish the project and provide what is expected. Another interesting point is how many projects change scope and try to accommodate extra tasks to make up for lost resources and time. This is another mistake our teams will try to avoid during the Governor’s Island project. These lessons will be relevant in my professional life because I will be ready to address these possible issues and mistakes with projects when I am working in groups or on projects in the future and working towards a solution will be easier since I will be more familiar with these types of issues.

**Classes of 9/10**

Classes this week primarily consisted of skills held by most project leaders, and where many project leaders fall short in terms of being able to provide the best leadership for their teams. For example, one aspect of the lectures covered two distinct types of project leaders: Transactional and Transformational, and where each type tends to overlap. And although the qualities can overlap, project leaders tend to be closer to one or the other than both. Knowing how to balance both aspects of leadership proved to be interesting to me because, as with many other qualities of project leaders we have been informed of, I was skeptical as to if project leaders were given this information, how they would not recognize their personal problem or where they fell on the spectrum and try to improve it. It most definitely must be harder than it looks and must take much introspection and analysis of one’s flaws and how they can be improved upon. I can use these lessons in my professional life by seeing where I fall on either side of Transactional and Transformational project leaders and trying to balance my understanding and practice of both in the workplace.

**Classes of 9/17**

Viewing this week’s lecture informed me about the necessary strengths to be a good project leader. The main four strengths that were mentioned were good communication, ability and flexibility to deal with ambiguity of requests and the project, being familiar with the project team, and influence tactics. The nature of a project leaders’ responsibilities can also take the form of being tradition and nontraditional. Traditional roles usually entail technical understanding, leadership over the team, and coordinating within the project while nontraditional roles call for the project leader to be a good cheerleader for the team, politician to represent the team and the project to sponsors, ambassador to sponsors and other people, and being able to take risks. The success and adeptness of a project leader should be measured in part by how well they meet these criteria and how well they can integrate these roles into the workspace.

What is still interesting to me is that much of these qualities of traditional and nontraditional roles are either natural to someone or completely foreign. For example, a leader may be extremely familiar technically with what the project is concerned with but might not have any people skills whatsoever. In my view, it seems that both areas have glaring necessary places in the workplace and it is hard to see how a project team would work well without them.

**Discussion for 9/18 – 9/20**

For a project to be successful, the project leader must demonstrate several necessary leadership qualities. These qualities are often named as good communication, being adaptive to the situation, able influence the sponsors and other important figures, and are familiar and comfortable with the team itself. Project leaders can minimize the risk of failure and create momentum for the team by focusing efforts on technical understanding of the field they are working with, managing project scope, and making sure the project team has the necessary resources to work well. However, good project leaders do also have to focus on relations with their team and sponsors by offering moral support and understanding to the members of the team as well as establishing good relations with the sponsor. If the members of the team see their leader with these qualities and feel the support, the project is much closer to becoming a success.

For example, in his article Ciriello mentions that the success of a project can be prevented in part by leaders worrying about compensation, job security, and performance reviews. Furthermore, Ciriello gives the reader the reminder to focus on the bigger picture, which is the completion of the project and providing exactly what is expected while also making sure that every step goes according to plan. Understanding the importance of sticking to the scope of a project can obviously minimize scope creep but also remind project members to be big picture oriented and keep them from worrying about smaller issues that do not affect the result. Ciriello goes on to say how important staying in the present is and how damaging dwelling on past mistakes or events can be to the motivation of a project.

By keeping the project team running well and focusing on the end goal, project leaders can minimize the risk of failure and keep momentum going resulting in a project much closer to success.

**Class of 9/25**

Lecture this week primarily consisted of what entails a project’s life cycle and what is included at each phase of it. As intuition suggests, the cycle starts with the conception of the idea or goal the project sets as its motive for existing. Next comes planning and execution of each item in the projects scope. As the project reaches completion, the project is prepared and handed off to another group once the current team is finished doing their part. Throughout these steps team deliverables occur to fill in those interested in the project on the project’s progress. The final deliverable happens when the team is finished accomplishing what it set out to do and presents the finished project or their finished part. More information was then shared on the roles that are most common for people in teams to fill while working on a project. Once again, the stress on communication and working well with the other members of the team is present. This seemed important to me as it is mentioned so much, and it makes sense that it is, because teams should be up front with any issues or ideas they come across, so the team can handle it together and come to a solution. Issues that might be relevant in my professional career will be how CS majors don’t really like to work in groups and would rather just do something themselves instead of relying on other people to do it in a way that they personally don’t like or agree with. Learning how to work with projects in this class will help towards preventing this from happening or give me skills on how to mitigate such issues.

**Class of 10/1**

This week’s lecture focused on how the specific goals of a project team contribute to reaching the project’s end goal. An element of this was the fact that having multiple people on a project team that can perform different tasks that others cannot is key. If you have many people on a team that are all only good at the same thing, the project will suffer as a result. Diversifying your project team and collecting members with many different skills in different areas helps along the process considerably. This made sense to me simply because having this setup covers far more options than having a bunch of people good at only one thing. It allows you to divide and conquer problems and tasks the project comes across. What resonated with me the most was the fact that the sum of the whole is greater than the parts alone. This is true especially with many people skilled in different areas because when they come together the team then has experts in multiple subjects instead of just a couple. I will be able to use this in my professional life if I need to delegate certain tasks to people that I know are both better than me at and also the best at in the project team. This will save time for me as well as others who would be less equipped to handle such circumstances.

**Class of 10/15**

This week in class each project team presented the project challenge that they researched. One that made the most sense to me was difficulties in Communication. If the team has difficulty talking with one another, almost nothing can get done because no discussion about what needs to be done can be had. Also, the clarity of communication is something to consider since what information one is communicating is only useful to the team if the team can understand what they are saying. Being able to communicate about possible or existing problems the team is facing is crucial because then discussion can occur as to how to mitigate the problem or prevent them from occurring. Once discussion happens then steps can be taken to solve the problem in an efficient manner. But if it is unclear as to what exactly the problem is or what the team is currently dealing with, the team will go in unprepared to handle the situation they are in and will prove to be quite difficult for the team to get passed. Communication is also very important when dealing with deadlines, which was another presentation topic. Deadlines are usually quite rigid, with little to no room for lateness for the delivery of what is required of the team. If teams do not meet the deadline, only bad things can occur for everyone involved. Communication plays a role here since if the deadlines are discussed at length by the team, the team will be much more likely to meet deadlines rather than not.

**Discussion for Week of 10/15 (W7)**

A challenge that resonated with me was a communication which was present during our meetings for the deliverables and governor’s island. Many times during the week, we were all either unsure or did not discuss much if we were going to work on projects that week. Although we would come to a decision somewhat last minute, planning around such last minute decisions is not desirable most of the time but does ensure that at least something gets done. Since we sometimes are not on the same page on where to move on to after accomplishing a goal in our scope, communication suffers and its unclear who should do what. That being said, we were able to accomplish all of our goals and the reason we didn’t communicate much is because we divided the work up early on and completed all of it rather quickly which resulted in it being unclear if we needed to meet or not, so the downsides to lack of communication were largely negligible for our team. In order to combat such communication struggles specifically in this situation would be to simply speak up and ask for everyone’s opinion and discuss in detail what we would accomplish if we met that day since no one knows a problem exists unless the person with a problem speaks up.

A challenge that resonated with me was how differing personalities can both help and hurt a project team. In order to maximize a team’s effectiveness, one must be familiar with the ins and outs of each team member’s personalities or at least how they interpret and think about information given to them. Not knowing such facts causes unfamiliarity with what problems people might have with aspects of the projects and also leads to misunderstanding what people mean and possibly taking things they say the wrong way. This can be solved by simply asking the person to elaborate but can also be avoided altogether by finding out early on how each person works and being introspective and critical of the ways that you present information to you team. The best way to guarantee that people don’t misunderstand you is to present the information you have to offer in a way that is easily understood by the people you are presenting to. In a vacuum this seems simple but in the real world there are many more caveats to how personalities work, as people are complicated and usually don’t follow any specific mold. Becoming familiar with your team and being aware of how you speak to them can definitely help your team become more efficient and effective.

**Class of 10/23**

This week we learned about the beginning stages of a project, mainly centered around planning and looking ahead by fleshing out a project life cycle. Obviously, there is no real way to know what will happen with a project in the future, but planning helps teams set a basic framework and benchmarks to see if they are on the right track. This makes sense to me because how would a team know what to accomplish in the cycle of their project without planning many of the major points in time. Knowing and being familiar with a projects life cycle and realizing the space in time it is supposed to take up would be useful as well in terms of knowing how this project will fit into the bigger picture. Another important point discussed this week was the constant updating of the project plan and making sure it stays updated as the conditions around the team change. Also, making sure everyone on the team is familiar with the plan is important because then there will be no ambiguity as to who on the team should fulfill each task and when, during the time period of the project, they will need to perform such tasks.

**Class of 10/30**

During class this week, we got into our project groups and answered questions that project leaders might have to deal with. A main focus this week was the communication of difficulties within the project team, such as speaking up to the project leader if a team member has questions or is having difficulty with performing their task. Asking questions is never a bad approach to solving a problem, especially since the people you could be asking could have the perfect answer you need to be able to get back to working on your project and be productive. Another point to communication was when a team member abruptly is removed from the team or quits from the establishment altogether, and what the next steps are that the team should take. The project leader must have a contingency plan for such an occasion that includes something akin to how to redistribute the work amongst the remaining members or using this blow to the team’s efficiency as a point to appeal to project sponsors to acquire more time or resources. In this situation the clarity of the project leader is important and being transparent with the project team is the key to relieving the stress that may come with the situation of a team member leaving. If the team sees that their leader is calm, it shows the team that the situation is being handled and does the opposite if the leader is in a panic.

**Class of 11/6**

This class we focused on communication. One common theme about many of the qualities project leaders and project teams must exhibit, is an overarching connection to communication. As we discuss all these qualities, there’s always some connection back to why communication is key. This makes sense because of all the negative possibilities that could arise without the presence of communication. A point that stuck with me from this class was the importance of the setting of communication. When you’re conversing with your fellow project team member, the setting and tone of how/where you speak plays a large role. If the two of you are simply talking over lunch about the steps needed for the future, information is more likely to be exchanged back and forth because of the informal environment. However, in larger scale meetings, some members could feel overshadowed by their fellow team members and feel like they have nothing else to add to the conversation. This can also be attributed to not making all project members comfortable with each other and ensuring fluidity of ideas exists. The role of encoders, or the “sender” of information, and the decoder, or “receiver” of information is also important to the team since as information comes in from the encoder, there needs to be a member that can decipher what the encoder means and how to distribute the tasks to the team.

**Class of 11/13**

The focus this week was on the mitigation and process to deal with conflicts within the project team. Often, people are scared of conflict because of all the short-term difficulties it brings with it. However, conflict brings up a valuable opportunity to learn from mistakes and from the difficulties that conflict causes. This overarching learning process is hard to keep in mind when dealing with the conflict in the present, as people usually only have eyes for what will solve the conflict and get them back to work and increase productivity. It is up to the project manager to remind the team members involved with the conflict of the lessons that could possibly be learned from such a conflict. This above information resonated with me, because it applies to a lot of the work we do in college. Although throughout one’s college career one may hit many conflicts and arduous challenges and things to discourage them from doing well, there is always something to learn and if you focus on what you can learn rather than how the difficulties cripple your progress you will be much better off. Two main lessons from this week’s session is how personalities flaring, goal clarity or lack thereof, and lack of understanding of one’s role in the team all contribute greatly to conflicts within the team. Secondly, the 3 typical types of conflicts that occur are within one’s own mind, interpersonal conflicts with others on the team, and conflicts between one team and another. This knowledge will be helpful when addressing conflicts in the workplace between team members.

**Class of 12/4**

This week’s class was primarily concerned with ethical and moral decisions that have to be made by project manager. As with many decisions project managers make, the decision on whether to act on an ethical or unethical way of doing business is largely subjective and based one’s own moral code and an evaluation of the situation at hand. If doing something a quick and easy way could also have serious impacts on the surrounding area, sometimes businesses and project managers decide to do whatever they were doing this way anyway simply because in the short term it is more cost effective and speeds the project along. A simple weighing of cause and effect and direct results of decisions you make can sometimes be enough, but often the verdict of how the decision is carried out is of the project manager’s opinion. What resonated with me the most during this session was the fact that so many businesses lack true ethical code until they are pressured by the law to do so or when their actions are monitored and threatened with legal involvement. The appeal of being able to have something to show to their superiors and speeding their project along seems to be too illustrious for many project managers to avoid. However, this can swing the other way as well since project managers can refuse to do things that are against their moral and ethical code. This makes them, and the project suffer but integrity is kept and ethics are not violated. This is an interesting trade off that some project managers have to make daily, as sometimes laws are not even considered when making decisions and one’s own ethical code takes precedence.

Final Reflection

This course provided a very candid and applicable experience with a project team that will be useful when I am faced with similar circumstances in the future. Most of what surprised me while taking this course is how naturally all the subjects came to me. The interpersonal skills especially made sense to me as the strategies to get people to tell you the truth about their work or general communication tactics I use in daily discourse with other people but just did not attribute the label of a “skill” to it. My father has been a long time Vice President of several software companies and before that a project manager for many years so many of the skills both technical and interpersonal he has learned have been passed down to me as well over the years which has helped immensely when weighing which options or approaches to situations would be better suited for the best outcome. I recognized a number of things he has said to me on your slides as well which reinforced that he both knew what he was talking about, and the value of the lesson. While thinking about many of the concepts you presented in lecture many of them clicked after a little thinking as to how it would apply to certain situations in my head, but nothing groundbreaking in terms of “a-ha” moments. I would definitely be interested in delving more into the specifics of project management in the future or how to be a good team member rather than a leader. In this course, I was not the leader but more of a team member that was happy to do any task so long as it didn’t conflict with anyone else’s which was a nice change since I usually have to take care of everyone and push them along. I am happy to say also that I feel like I contributed a helpful amount to the team and was more of an asset than a liability. Since I have now been on both sides and have experienced both perspectives, I intend to use these viewpoints as ways to understand another person on a future team as I am talking to them to give me insight as to what they might be thinking and what to do moving forward in the conversation. More of a point rather than a disagreement; technical skills are important to be sure; however, I feel that interpersonal skills are almost more important as one can have a team of the smartest people in the world in a room, but nothing will get done as a team if they cannot stow their egos and cooperate. Learning to see the other side and thinking as a team rather than an individual I feel is one of the most important aspects of a successful team more so than any technical skills. There is a limit to how little technical skill a team member can have; however, because if there was no minimum just about anyone could apply for the spot regardless of experience. So, I do recognize the worth of technical skills, but I think for the most part that interpersonal skills are far more important assuming that each team member meets the minimum technical skills. Since we had limited time, I understand that much of the financial sources and transportation were assumed to be cooperative so that we could focus more on the teaming aspects of the Governor’s Island project. However, the idea of debating or negotiating with a sponsor or how to get people to the island interests me and the nature of the discussion would produce valuable negotiation experience for students. Although many of us will not be deal closers in the workplace, learning how to get what you want out of a deal and assets that you and your team will benefit greatly off of is incredibly valuable. Since many of the practices described throughout the course I use in regular conversation and discussion, I will enjoy the benefits of such lessons for years to come and in professional environments.

Top Five Take-Aways:

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| **Top 5 Takeaways** | **Why did you choose this one?** | **How can you use this professionally?** |
| Life Cycle of Project | It is vital to know generally what stages projects go through. This is because being able to adeptly determine what stage a project is in will show you what steps you have taken so far and what steps you may want to take in the future. This is important to know since it gives you a framework, albeit generally, of how your project may work during its life. | I can use this in a professional environment to show myself exactly the place I and my team are on in our path to our goals. Knowing this and informing others will be useful because it keeps everyone on the same page and ensures that everyone has a general framework as to how the project they are working on is going to continue and eventually end. |
| Teaming Stages | This information is incredibly important to building one’s interpersonal skills. Knowing which stage your team is at helps when trying to make the team work together. If you know the stages of teaming, you also know how to progress your team to the next stage and what to avoid so as not to revert back to previous stages. | When forming a team, this will be useful in the beginning for when everyone is getting to know each other because it provides a framework for how these interactions should occur and what to look out for. As a leader, it will be useful to know what could happen to my team for better or for worse and how the typical qualities of the stages apply to our team specifically |
| Qualities of Good Teamwork | Teams do not do well unless all members are working for the benefit of the team. Being able to illustrate this fact and how to achieve a productive team is vital to the survival and goals of the project. | Teamwork will be especially important to me as a project leader, should I ever be one. Many problems of the world could be solved theoretically if the entire human race dedicated their lives to finding out answers and solutions to the problems that plague us daily. Knowing this fact, I would use the qualities of good teamwork to show my team their potential and the productivity that could be achieved if the team was able to cooperate. |
| Qualities of a Good Project Manager | Having the knowledge of how to be a good project manager to one’s team is very important to the team’s success. The team needs a capable leader that is familiar with the team’s needs and how each member specifically operates. | Being a good project manager is invaluable to the success of the project and thusly, is a very important concept to me. In my professional career I plan to continue to learn how to be a leader by watching and learning from other project managers in the company I am working at. I want to get to know my team like they are my close friends and want them to feel comfortable with me as well so that fewer miscommunications can occur and more honesty will be present when I ask them questions. |
| Communication | Team members that have good communication are almost always also the most productive teams and are very efficient. This is because every member is constantly updating each other on what to do next and what they are personally doing and how it contributes to the larger goal of the team. Communication is the only way that ideas can be shared throughout a team, and having good communication suited to the situation the team is in will help immensely. | A team practically does not exist if the team members are not talking to one another in a constructive manner. I specify constructive communication since destructive communication and anything that does not lead the team to success or to the goals of the project will help in no way whatsoever. If the team is able to subdue their egos and work with each other and treat each other as equals, honest discussion and common understandings can occur and the team will be much closer to their goals than if they were all arguing or if limited communication was had. |