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Project Leadership Paper

*Why are project managers important to projects? Key roles?*

In order to accomplish any task, especially group work or large-scale projects, a project manager is essential. Project managers provide strong leadership and great ability to work with many different kinds of people and bring them together to work towards a common goal. Having a capable project manager also allows for easy communication directly from the team members to the project sponsors, as the project manager will effectively communicate what each team member needs from the sponsors or take in all input and concisely present the team’s case to the sponsors. This allows for a relationship between the project sponsors and the project manager to develop rather than many different people from the same team interacting with the sponsors which would disallow for any meaningful relationship to develop. Project managers also keep the project team on task by reminding each team member of the goals they need to accomplish and the amount of time they have to accomplish said goals. Good project managers also build relationships with their team members such that team members are not afraid the be honest with the project manager and feel comfortable working with the manager. This provides for clear communication of possible problems or solutions that team members may not be confident to share otherwise because they would not feel comfortable enough with the project manager.

*How can an effective Project Manager impact a project?*

The effectiveness of a project manager largely depends on his/her ability to communicate clearly and work with the project team. Once constructive relationships are established between the manager and the team, the true effectiveness of a project manager comes to fruition. An effective project manager keeps all team members focused and in line with the goals of the project, reminding the team along the way why their work is essential to the success of the project and giving them motivation as to why they should work hard to ensure the success of the project. Also, an effective project manager communicates adeptly with the project sponsors, being able to negotiate fair deals for what the team may need while always keeping the interest of the team and the project in mind.

*What are the key competencies needed to be an effective project manager?*

To be an effective project manager, one must have a good combination of interpersonal and technical skills. Project managers should have no trouble communicating with their team and figuring out the best conditions that would help the team accelerate productivity and emphasize motivation. Interpersonal skills are crucial in this scenario because if the project manager is not able to communicate clearly with the project team, nothing the project manager does will be effective since the team is not invested in what the project manager needs out of the team and vice versa. Technical skills is a key competency of a project manager as well because a project manager should be familiar with the technical aspects of each of the team member’s portions of the project so that they can ask specific questions to the team members and the team members can communicate their thoughts in specific as well instead of giving surface level descriptions of what they are thinking.

*Share one example of an effective project manager in action.*

An example of an effective project manager would be the case of Cengage Learning. Cengage is a company focused on creating educational resources for students based mostly in online services. In one specific case, the project team was “unable to forecast capacity effectively” and “they wanted to integrate the planning and execution stages of product delivery.” Knowing this, the project manager went to the sponsors and used “portfolio and resource management investment and capacity planning to show executives all the great work they could tackle if they just had the sufficient resources” (Planview). In this example, the project team was having difficulties that were preventing them from efficiently doing their work. Noticing this and hearing out the project team’s needs, the project manager took to the project sponsors and effectively communicated their struggles in a way that showed the potential the team had if their needs be fulfilled. This resulted in project sponsors giving the team more time to complete more menial tasks so that they could focus on the actual task of the project instead of the parts that were holding them down.

*What are the key challenges facing project managers today?*

Project managers face many challenges that prevent projects from realizing their true potential. One such example is unfamiliarity and unclear goals. This challenge makes it hard for teams to be motivated towards any goal, as the goals may be not fleshed-out and hard to understand how they relate to the tasks at hand in the present. Related, the challenge of unrealistic deadlines as well as goals plague project managers as they try to accommodate for their team but are also pressured by deadlines that do not allow the necessary time to finish in a way that does not sacrifice some part of the project. Project managers also face scope creep where the addition of more goals or deadlines clouds the original intent of the project and the main goal needed to be accomplished by the team. In addition, project managers that struggle with working with a team are quite challenged when trying to lead their project team to the goals of the project. Similarly, effective and clear communication can be a challenge for project managers since the expression of one’s thoughts will be unclear and not lead to any progress without much deliberation and adversity.

*Share one example of a challenge faced by a project manager and what was done?*

In the case of Suzanna Haworth, she inherited a project and a team that was working with another agency. The other agency would code a certain part of the project and then send it to Haworth’s team, where it would then be processed and Haworth’s team would add their necessary lines to the code. However, the other agency would incessantly output newer updates to the code they had sent previously to Haworth’s team, making any of the work Haworth’s team just did completely irrelevant. The other agency did not account for Haworth’s team building off the old code and kept sending new copies rather than working towards a solution together. This resulted in scope creep causing many delays, an unhappy client, and both teams had an extreme lack of motivation. What Haworth suggests could have been done about this instance of scope creep is evaluating who could be the source of the scope creep. Although the client can usually be the source of such a challenge, in Haworth’s case this was not true as team members and either team would “make decisions in a vacuum” without considering the impact of their actions and how their work relates to the bigger picture. By doing this, the other agency could have seen that Haworth’s team was using the old code in their work and could have communicated a possible solution to this problem rather than allow it to continue to delay the project. In this case, nothing was done about the scope creep until the end of the project where everyone was unhappy with the result and could only look back on their actions to try and learn for next time.

*What are the key takeaways you would share?*

In the case of Haworth, she details all the possible sources of scope creep from her experience and how to combat each. The most important take away would be to have the foresight that this miscommunication between the two teams could happen and take measures to try and mitigate or prevent the problem from becoming worse. This; however, can be unrealistic to expect a project manager to have such foresight on such issues, so the more practical answer would be to have the skill set to mitigate the problem as soon as either team expresses difficulty in completing their work. Always keeping an open channel of communication between the teams would help immensely and keep each project manager and thusly the teams on the same page, eliminating the problem of using old code unknowingly. Another point that stood out was the fact that neither team saw any problem with this system until the end or did nothing majorly useful about the problem until being dissatisfied at the end. This is an important lesson because if the teams had just communicated their problems to each other instead of trying to find ways to work with the problems they were giving each other, the teams would be much better off.

Works Cited

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