Module 4: Critical Thinking

Discovering Customer and Stakeholder Need Statements

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When discovering a clients want and need statements, Siegel recommends that you do not “ask what the user wants”, because they "are likely to have a strong understanding of their current mission, but are highly unlikely to be expert at designing systems and effective user experiences" (Siegel, 2017, pg. 117). If project managers do not explicitly ask what the clients want, how do they know what the clients are needing, and how do clients measure value? And when designing the project, how do project managers manage competing demands from the stakeholders? This paper discusses methods to find and meet a clients need statements, how stakeholders measure value for a project, and how to manage clients conflicting demands.

In order to find the need statements for the project, a project manager should first get to know the stakeholders and end users, what problems the new project is designed to solve, and what the clients are currently doing to resolve the problems we are trying to solve with the new project. Acquiring the full picture of the problems the new project is going to solve and how it effects the users, prepares project managers to develop an understanding of the client’s mission, needs, and wants.

After getting a full understanding of the clients and the challenges the project is aiming to solve, we would gather what the values the clients are considering for the project are. For a 3D Printing company, the goals might be to have a fast, easy, and secure way for their clients to view and purchase the available 3D printing products and services that they offer. These are all operational performance measures, and knowing what they are, Engineers can come up with the technical performance measures to address the client’s goals. For example, the operational performance measure of being fast and easy can be addressed by the engineering team by using a Single Page App (SPA) to display the information on the web page. Doing so makes it so that there is only one page to load, and as soon as it is loaded, the customer can navigate through the site’s products and make a purchase.

The clients’ values are also geared toward the mission itself and with that they are trying to solve with the project, whereas the engineer’s design choices characterize something about the technology that implements the system” (Siegel, 2017, pg. 109). By analyzing the client’s values, engineers can design the project in a way that each technical choice that they make will address the clients’ values and provide benefit to the end users. Being able to explain how each technical choice the engineer makes effects the clients operational performance measures help to build credibility and trust with the proposed solution. Being able to translate the technical details and how they relate to operational performance measures is an important skill to have as a Project Manager.

To manage competing demands from stakeholders, while tailoring the design concept to meet the project objectives, it is important to have interpersonal skills in check. The PMBOK Guide-Seventh edition suggests that overcoming resistance to change and building trust can be used to help manage stakeholder expectations (PMI, 2017). Big changes are involved in a new project, and there could be resistance to it. Some of the reasons why there may be resistant to change could be that clients or users feel overwhelmed or feel comfortable with the old ways of doing things (Semeniuk, 2010). To overcome resistant to change, project managers should listen to the employee’s concerns. Allowing the concerns to be heard and listening to their perspective can help take away client’s frustrations and confusion, and it may even help make improvements to the project plan. By being transparent and open throughout the project, you will help develop trust with the clients. Having a trusting relationship with the stakeholders gives project managers a “good position to discuss their expectations and to work with them to resolve conflicts regarding these expectations” (Semeniuk, 2010, Trust).

**Conclusion**

In order to discover the want and need statements from clients, there needs to be an understanding of where the stakeholders and users are coming from, and what challenges they are trying to overcome with the given project. Having this complete understanding of who the stakeholders and users are and what challenges the project is aiming to solve prepares you to understand the need and want statements. Knowing that the values that the stakeholders have for the project are operational performance measures which are geared toward the project itself, typically non-technical in nature, project managers need to tailor our engineers design choices to address their values. Being able to translate how engineering design choices will affect the client’s operational performance measures is an important skill to have, as project managers need to remember that not all the stakeholders are technical. To manage competing demands from stakeholders, it is important to have interpersonal skills in check. Being transparent throughout the project and listening to the client’s concerns is a great way to build trust, and helping others overcome resistant to change. By being an effective communicator, providing transparency, and translating how engineer’s design choices fit in to the client’s needs and wants are skills that help discover and meet the client’s needs and wants, as well as resolving competing demands throughout the project lifecycle.

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