

The Project Manager

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Abstract

Dell Technologies is a leading global technology company that provides technology solutions and services ranging from infrastructure to software and devices (Dell EMC, n.d.). As an intern at Dell Technologies, I got the opportunity to work on an interesting development project along with three other interns for twelve weeks. We reported to the project manager who oversaw as well as managed all the projects on our larger team. Throughout my internship, there were many characteristics of the project manager that I found influential and some skills that could be improved.

Introduction

Dell Technologies, founded by current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Michael Dell, is comprised of a family of businesses including Dell, Pivotal, RSA, Secureworks, Virtustream, VMware, and the recently acquired EMC in 2016, which marked the biggest tech deal in history (Dell Technologies, n.d.). These organizations are a collective force of innovative efforts with a strong presence in 180 countries worldwide. Dell Technologies provides infrastructure for organizations to expand on their digital assets, transform the Information Technology (IT) industry, as well as protect information (Dell EMC, n.d.). Their mission is to advance human progress by providing greater access to technology for people around the world (Dell Technologies, n.d.).

As an undergraduate student studying Computer Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, I got the unique opportunity to pursue a software engineering internship at Dell Technologies in the Storage Department. The team works on high-performance storage systems and delivers next-generation tools to improve the efficiency of development operations as well as quality using advanced technologies, tools, and software engineering methodologies.

Three other college interns and I worked on a project to design and develop a website for quality assurance analysts to execute and analyze test cases for various storage projects that are underway for release. We reported to Alison, the project manager for our larger team, about our progress. Some characteristics that I found helpful and influential were her leadership skills, commitment to training the interns, communication, and interpersonal skills. Some skills that could have been improved were planning and problem solving skills as well as giving constructive feedback.

Discussion

Performance and Skill Set

Alison showcased many strengths as a project manager. One of those strengths includes her leadership skills. When I first stepped into the company, Alison was there to guide me every step of the way whenever it was necessary. I was the first intern to start my internship out of my four person internship team. She gave me time to get adjusted to the environment, showed me my cube, and also introduced me to my main points of contacts over the summer who were the technical lead and scrum master. She then included me in the weekly team meetings to introduce me to the larger team. Having this introduction and establishing people to ask questions is crucial to starting a new job. This experience was a step in the right direction to ensuring an interesting, challenging, yet fun summer.

In addition, when the other interns also arrived on their first day, Alison made it clear that she was committed to helping us develop our skills, get on-the-job training, as well as be able to have a meaningful experience to apply our skills in a practical sense. Throughout our project and one-on-one meetings, she emphasized the learning aspect of the internship. She mentioned that it was important to be constantly learning, especially in the technology industry, and encouraged not only the intern team but also her larger team to keep learning. It was clear that she wanted us to succeed and would go out of her way to help us. In addition, she also said that it is okay to fail and that is how we as humans learn the most. I had also asked about her career path and how she got to where she was today. She was very much willing to go over her journey and also had a lot of interesting personal growth stories while navigating her own internship experiences. She was very inspiring and motivational, which is what made her stand out as a project manager.

Alison also had exceptional communication and interpersonal skills. She made sure to regularly communicate with the intern team. In addition, she was also up to date with what we were doing and talked to the scrum master and technical lead to get their feedback. She was knowledgeable in the field and knew about all the details of projects she was managing. Alison also told us that if we had any questions or concerns that we could reach out to her at any point. She made herself available even though she had a busy schedule. She had a great working relationship with us and also clearly communicated her expectations. When myself and my intern colleagues were unsure about anything related to the project she quickly stepped in and made sure we understood the problem. She showed empathy as she was an intern herself and knew how to make the intern team comfortable. Overall, I feel grateful that I got the opportunity to work with her and be part of her team as an intern.

Improvements

Although Alison had excellent strengths, she also had areas to improve as a project manager. Alison could develop her planning and problem solving skills as the intern team encountered a scope creep situation. During the development phase of the internal website, my team and I presented our demo and updates which was midway through our internship. Some features took longer to implement than the team had previously planned so we mentioned that it was a work in progress. However, some teammates wanted to add on more features that they thought would be useful for users to both the database and website design that was neither discussed nor got approval during the Agile Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) phases. The changes were large and would detour the route of the project. Making these changes would

also mean that my team and I would not have time to finish the project, leading to a lack of quality of the website by leaving approved features unfinished. Planning the project out more thoroughly could have helped mitigate this issue and avoid concerns for the intern team.

Moreover, emphasizing the project objectives to her larger team would have further clarified the intern team's scope and prevented this problem. In addition, developing problem solving skills to detect these kinds of problems before they occur would also be essential. Mastering this skill would be easier for Alison as she already has great communication and interpersonal skills as previously discussed.

Another skill that would help Alison become an outstanding project manager is to give constructive feedback to myself and the intern team. She mentioned throughout our internship that everybody has some skill to work on and that nobody is totally perfect in the industry. It would have been helpful to learn about skills that she thought we could improve on after the internship completed. For example, myself and Alison did have a one-on-one meeting at the end of my internship to discuss how my overall experience went. She exclaimed how it was great that the intern team finished making the website and learned the whole SDLC methodology along the way. It was nice to know that our accomplishments were appreciated and would be used in the team. I wanted to know if I had anything specific to work on and asked her directly about her feedback. She mentioned that I was doing great throughout the internship, complimented my soft skills and technical skills, and told me to keep learning wherever I decide to go. While it was useful feedback to know that I was going in the right direction in terms of my career, it also would have been nice to know some constructive feedback as she previously said everybody has a skill to work on. Getting positive feedback is one thing, but being able to reflect

on areas to improve would further help develop myself both professionally as well as personally.

Thus, being able to convey all types of feedback is an important skill for project managers.

Conclusion

It is important for a project manager to encompass strong characteristics in order to lead themselves and their team to success. Alison embodied leadership skills, commitment to training team members, communication, and interpersonal skills. Some skills that she could work on were planning and problem solving skills as well as giving constructive feedback. Overall, reflecting on Alison's strengths and weaknesses helped to know the important skills needed to be a successful project manager.

References

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