

Science: Integrating Theory and Practice

icet

2014

KEY SKILLS OF A PROJECT MANAGER FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

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The world becomes project-focused one. Any new activity associates with projects. Projects are one of the means by which the world is changed. What is a project? There is a set of definitions. The Project Management Institute has given the capacious one: "A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service" [1].

Project management covers a wide spectrum of activities and overlaps with general management principles and other application areas [2]. It is an integrated and interdisciplinary body of knowledge. On the other hand, the role of a project management can be described by only one word. This word is challenging. Project management help to manage the challenges arising from the environment of postindustrial era. Projects start to play important role in the Kazakhstani economy. As never before, Kazakhstani companies face international competition and necessity to manage projects with success.

The project is successful if effectively managed. It is known that project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and methods to project operations to satisfy the requirements of the project [1]. Everybody who is acquainted with project management knows that projects have to be carried out through the application, overlapping and integration of project processes. They are:

1. Initiating.
2. Planning.
3. Executing
4. Controlling.
5. Closing [1,2].

A project manager is in charge of all the aspects of the project, including doing plans for the project, executing them, controlling the project to keep it on way as planned, communicating with the stakeholders, managing risks, and closing the project properly at the right time. It is should not be forgotten that the project manager's core responsibilities overlap with the project lifecycle. If a project manager is responsible for achieving goals and objectives of any project what responsibilities are important for him/her?

An important key to performing all the project manager's responsibilities successfully is communication because a project manager is dealing with a wide functional variety of stakeholders, ranging from CEO, team members, to accountant. The key point by P. Sanghera [3] is that a project manager has to put on the appropriate communication "hat" depending on an individual. The goal is to use the understandable language to send messages accurately.

In this case a project manager plays roles of:

- Facilitator;
- Point person;
- Organizer and planner;
- Resource manager;
- Leader;
- Coach and mentor.

We suppose that the role of a leader is the most important. Leadership guru Warren Bennis stated that without leadership would not be possible to manage projects. He said: "Anybody can do things right, but it takes leadership to get people motivated to do the right things" [4]. Some authors think that leadership and team-building skills are critical to successful project management [5]. On the other hand, it is not easy to understand is the project manager real leader or not? What does project leadership involve? The answer of Warren Bennis is the next [4]: effective project leadership involves

- forming goals;
- getting resources;

- distributing roles;
- building organizational structures;
- establishing communications;
- moving things forward to a successful conclusion.

From our point of view this list has to be extended by a project manager's important skills as problem solving, communication, team building, negotiation, influence. These types of activities are primary for project managers and help him/her to work out best solutions for a project. They are more akin to the activities related with so-called "soft skills". "These skills are quite different from those that figured in the original training of most project managers, which is often of a technical nature" [2].

Project managers need to get things done in situations where their authority is, at best, ambiguous in relation to people in different departments, reporting to different line managers. In reality, many project managers have very little formal authority, especially in functional organizations. The authority delegated to them needs to be quite "clear and communicated throughout the organization" [5]. Moreover, a project manager's authority may be frustrated by siloing effects.

Managing projects effectively takes a multitude of skills. For example, P. Sanghera [3] considers that a project manager needs two kinds of skills: the management-related skills and interpersonal ones. The management-related skills are here:

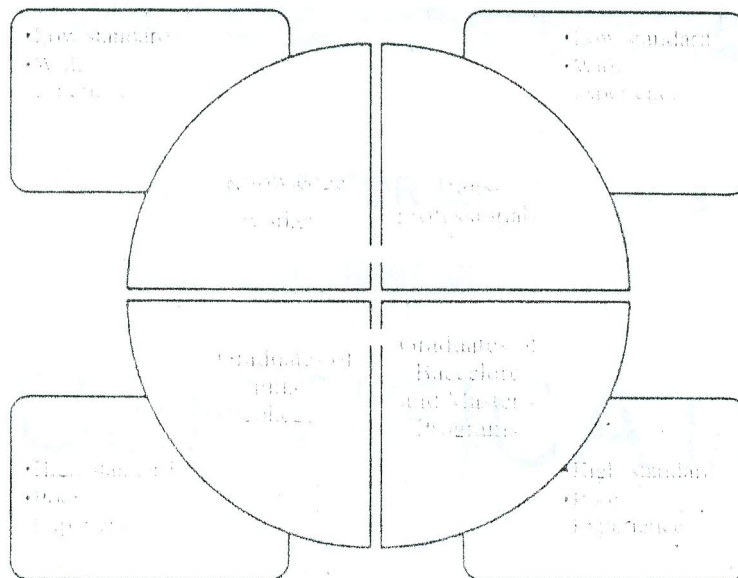
- Accounting and financial management;
- Attention to details;
- Information technology;
- Negotiation and conflict management;
- Problem-solving;
- Sales and marketing.

As a result, people learn by heart standards on project management, try to raise their level of proficiency, read many books on management and project management, participate courses, and try to get PMP. It is not bad. It is good. But sometimes future project managers forget about social aspects that can be associated with interpersonal skills. They help a project manager to interact with all the project stakeholders. To lead a project to success, a project manager must be able to use interpersonal skills with ease. They are: communication; influencing; leadership; networking; intelligence.

Furthermore, P. Gardiner insists that 'there is a growing realization that project management performance is more closely related to the softer skills than the hard skills' [2]. People are the central part of project management, not the procedures and techniques. People are critical for projects. Procedures and techniques are merely tools that help people make their projects successful.

When people talk about 'hard' or 'soft' project management skills, they are referring to the nature of the skills concerned. The term "hard skills" generally refers to the mechanical and technical skills of planning, estimating, scheduling and controlling a project. Project management training courses often focus almost exclusively on teaching these hard skills, which reflects the historical development of project management as a discipline. Soft skills, on the other hand, are people skills, such as interpersonal communication, commitment to success, negotiation, consensus problem solving, leadership and motivation. These skills deal with human factor issues and, until recently, have been less well discussed in project management literature.

P. Gardiner also writes that the 'soft' skills are much harder to learn and use effectively in contrast to "hard" skills [2]. Our ability to learn and use hard skills, for example drawing networks and calculating a project's budget, is partly linked to our IQ (intelligence quotient), which is established relatively early in life. Soft skills are more related to our EQ (emotional quotient) or emotional intelligence, which can continue to develop as we mature or through training. So, we could draw a conclusion according to which soft skills are developing through wide experience at a workplace. This idea is presented in the Malinovsky's matrix [6]:



Picture 1. Malinovsky's matrix

The Malinovsky's matrix shows that project managers as transprofessionals have to develop their soft skills in order to reach goals of projects. Hard skills are associated with Bachelor and Master's Programs where students are taught to things that can be demonstrated well.

So, saying about key skills of a project manager for project success we consider leading, communicating, negotiating, problem solving, influencing the organization that are "highly likely to affect most projects" [1].

References:

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