

# Project Management Digest

*Our newsletter that highlights some current developments, topical issues, and best practices in project management. Volume 35, April 2009 Edition*

## ***Editorial – Success and Survival in Crisis***

*In view of the ongoing global economic crunch, we have chosen to address issues that affect the performance and survival of businesses. Effective communication, both within and without the organisation, is essential for survival and success. The quality of the leadership is another factor. Members of the organisation should go about their assignments in the confidence that their leaders will keep a cool head, remain in control, and take constructive and positive actions in spite of the inclement environment. This is positive leadership. It does not just happen, it has to be learnt. We have suggested some guidelines on how to develop the skill.*

*Survival and success are goals that every entrepreneur and business should aim at; come rain, come sunshine. There are numerous articles on business publications on such topics. We welcome any contributions our readers wish to make. In the meantime however, we need to read, study, and apply whatever we glean from our articles. The reward comes from reading and applying what we learn and not just from reading. Thank you.*

## **Headlines**

### **List of Articles in this Issue**

1. Positive Communication for Project Success.
2. Eight Ways Consultant can Succeed in a Turbulent Economy
3. Positive Leadership in Project Management, Essential for Success in Difficult Times.
  - 3.1 Planning for the Uncertain Future and Difficult Times
  - 3.2. Guidelines for Positive Leadership in Crisis

### **News Items**

EMEA 2009 , 18- 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2009  
PMI Global Congress,  
Amsterdam RAI Convention Centre, Amsterdam, Netherlands



# Details

## **Detailed Account of Articles**

### **1. Positive Communication for Project Success.**

Positive Communication among project team members is essential for success in project management. It may take several forms such as the following:

- Communication among project team members and leaders
- Listening to feedback when planning
- Being willing to perform a lessons learned and accept that no project is 100% perfect and there is always room for improvement. Check egos at the door and listen so that you and the activities can grow and be even better next time.

#### **Ensure Your Communication is in a Format that Suits Your Audience:**

Even the most perfectly written communication is worthless if it does not elicit appropriate response from its audience. To ensure effectiveness, we suggest the following actions:

1. Review previous communications and determine what did and did not work, and learn from them.
2. Do not assume that a single method will work. If you have not received the response you expected, send a follow up communication preferably in another form.

#### **Learn from the Past, Plan for the Future, Perfect the Present**

It does not matter how well the project has been designed and executed, there are always things that can be done better. It is always prudent to look at past projects to learn what worked and what did not. Take stock of what occurred and document your findings so that the lessons learned can be used next time and help the next project be even more successful. It is unwise to think that a project manager, even the most seasoned, can anticipate all gaps and shortfalls in a project and therefore should be open to hearing the “negative” along with the accolades. It is often through the mistakes or shortfalls that we really learn, and learning about them should be seen as

an asset and should not be taken personally. 'Lessons learned' is one of a project manager's most valuable tools.

Lessons learned should not be confined to after a project, but rather be reviewed periodically throughout the project at milestones. A project manager (PM) should not be hesitant to review a project mid-stream and make changes as needed.

### **Team of Communicators; we are all in it together**

1. It is important that the burden does not fall solely on the PM. It may be that the PM thinks the communications are going along nicely and may have no idea that things are falling through the cracks. An expectation should be set up early on that all members of the project team are to speak up if they see a gap, and the PM should listen and investigate when a gap is reported.
2. The PM may be so engrossed in the project that he/she may not be able to detect the gap and this is just one reason why the project team is an asset, not only for their specific specialties, but also for their individual perspectives.
3. A PM needs to follow the guidance of the team sometimes. So as a PM, you are the leader, and that skill is one to be treasured, but never forget to at times sit back and listen and follow the advice of your team.

### **Conclusion**

1. The bottom line is that communication is a cornerstone for a successful project. The best laid plans will fall apart if there is insufficient communication.
2. It is also useful to know that sometimes we all need reminders. And some of us need to remember that it is okay to have our team tell us something that is not working.
3. All told, whether it goes well or not, the PM is ultimately responsible for the outcome. It is the PM who sets the stage for the type of communication that occurs. Therefore, we should not underestimate our power as leaders, nor our power as followers, and the importance of both.

Acknowledgement: This has been adapted from an article by Laura Moore (PMP, M.A. Social Psychology). She works as a Senior Project Manager in the telecommunications industry and lives in California with her husband Lorin, and their two daughters.

## **2. Eight Ways Consultants can Succeed in a Turbulent Economy**

### **1. Focus on the client**

When the economy sours, client satisfaction becomes paramount. Forging long-term relationships with clients, in which their specific needs and objectives come first, will help you stand a much better chance of prospering.

### **2. Market your business at all times**

People cannot hire you if they do not know what you do.

### **3. Treat yourself as a client**

Ask yourself what advice you'd give your organization if you were hired to help solve its problems.

### **4. Leverage your investments**

Be reasonable with expenses and ensure any investment has a direct tie to fuelling existing business, generating new revenue, or reducing operating costs.

### **5. Maintain your skills**

Sure, maintaining your skills is easier said than done, but it's critical to your success.

### **6: Keep your regular rates**

Do not panic and lower rates. If your organization doesn't cover its costs of conducting business, it cannot survive tough economies.

### **7. Strengthen vendor relationships**

You should not underestimate the importance of strong vendor relationships, particularly those providing general IT support and services.

### **8. Choose niches carefully**

IT consultants often target a specific niche, such as physicians' offices, manufacturing firms, or energy companies.

Acknowledgement: This material has been prepared from an article by Erik Eckel who holds Microsoft Certified Professional, Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer, and CompTIA Network+ certifications. He has written and edited best-selling computer books for such publishers as Coriolis, O'Reilly, and TechRepublic.

## **3. Positive Leadership in Project Management, Essential for Success in Difficult Times.**

One of the most difficult times for a leader should be during a period of global, national and organisational uncertainties when he cannot directly influence the environmental factors that threaten the stability and confidence of the people within

the organization. The truly effective leaders should plan for the potential bad times while enjoying the achievements and steady progress of the teams they lead. Such enjoyment might include the pride a leader feels when teams work together to deliver on performance and meet objectives.

### **3.1 Planning for the Uncertain Future and Difficult Times**

#### **1. In Prosperity, Prepare for the Uncertain Future**

During periods of prosperity, a leader should maintain a watchful eye on the uncertainties that lie ahead. In the past six months, it is clear that within the economy that changes occurred rapidly and often with little warning. The lessons learned in this period have caused many organizations to redefine themselves in terms of strategies, product offerings, and financial capability. What appeared to be at one time a relatively secure position for many people has been transformed into a quagmire of uncertainty. It is important to work towards stability in times of crisis.

#### **2. Take Charge in Crisis**

In the movie Apollo 13, Gene Kranz saw his highly trained and skilled team reach near panic when the space module experienced the explosion. As the flight director, and leader of this team, he quickly took action to regain focus for the team. He stopped them from continuing their crisis driven behaviour and guided them to think not in terms of what had failed but in terms of what was still functioning. His focus was two fold; he dealt with the crisis and showed the astronauts that they should have confidence in the team while positively keeping the team's energy driving toward a solution.

#### **3. Take Decision based on Analysis and Study:**

Every leader needs to know that there is a risk in every decision, therefore, each decision requires some analysis before it is taken and executed. In project management, this is described as impact analysis. It is a commonly known step in most change control processes and is directly related to decision making and risk management. Impact analysis provides the leader and the team with an opportunity to develop scenarios about what could happen as a result of a decision. In crisis situations the amount of time for analysis is limited and decisions must be made quickly. These decisions can have monumental consequences. For this reason it is important for leaders to consider potentially unfavourable situations during periods of calm and relative stability.

#### **4. Prepare for the future by Perceiving Possible Scenarios**

In the book “The Art of the Long View”, Peter Schwartz suggests that since we cannot predict the future, the leader should prepare for the future by developing scenarios about what could happen. These scenarios are compared with current trends and changes in the business environment; strategies are then developed based on which scenario seems to be most in line with what is occurring or is likely to occur. This approach may not completely protect the organization from the effects of a bad economy or other unfavourable situations but it can prepare the organization to deal with these situations more effectively and with greater stability and sustainability.

5. “Chance favours the prepared mind” – Louis Pasteur.

Leaders do not rely on luck to achieve success for their organizations, they prepare themselves by honing their leadership skills. They listen to other points of view, they surround themselves with thinkers and experts, they talk with employees, and they focus on quality and continuous improvement.

6. Develop Loyalty in your Team

Leaders also should develop loyalty within their organizations. Loyalty is a key factor in difficult times and can mean the difference between managing through the turmoil of a poor economy and sinking in the storm.

### **3.2. Guidelines for Positive Leadership in Crisis**

There may be no secret formula or a guaranteed methodology for managing in a crisis but there are some things a leader can do to keep their teams focused and the organization stable while dealing with the unrest, uncertainty, and rapid changes that accompany difficult times.

The following is a list of suggested guidelines for achieving positive leadership in a crisis environment:

- Remain visible to your team. They need to see you out there, among them, learning and experiencing what they are experiencing.
- Show confidence in yourself. A shaky leader creates a shaky team.
- Provide guidance and support. They need to see a steady hand and an attentive attitude.
- Stay “cool”. This is not easy to do and you certainly don’t want to over do it. Coolness here means remaining calm, showing a strong image, and a confident stride. True leaders know how to talk to people with self confidence and empathy without being condescending or threatening.

- Tell the truth. Many leaders attempt to spin information. People will see through that and lose respect. Town hall meetings, small group discussions, one on one talks where solid, factual information is shared will keep the organization functioning.
- Keep the team focused on mission critical issues and projects. Avoid distractions.
- Remain enthusiastic about the organization. Talk about opportunities, encourage new ideas, avoid gloom and doom analogies. Be honest and don't sugar coat the situation. People should know that you are aware of the current situation and are realistic about the future.

Leadership can be challenging when an organization or a team faces difficult situations but it is during those times that the true leader emerges to inspire, provide hope, and create a positive attitude that will sustain the organization.

Acknowledgement: This article has been modified from an article written by **Frank P. Saladis, PMP**, a Senior Consultant with International Institute for Learning, Inc. He has been involved in the development of standardized Project Management Guidelines (PMGs) for the AT&T Corporate Information Technology Services (Corporate ITS) organization and is the author of the Project Evaluation Review Process (PERP). He is the recipient of the 2006 PMI Linn Stuckenbruck person of the year award.

## **Total Technology Consultants Limited**

The company represents Oracle Primavera Systems Inc, in Nigeria and provides the following services:

- Procurement of Oracle Primavera Solutions
- Training on Oracle Primavera Software
- Implementation of Oracle Primavera Products
- Training on Generic Project Management
- Staff Augmentation
- Project Management Consultancy

**Local PMI Chapter**

Your local chapter is PMI Nigeria Port Harcourt Potential Chapter. We meet on the first Tuesday of every month at Total Technology Consultants Limited, No. 10 Fourth Avenue, Ihuaku House, Rumuibekwe.

You are welcome to comment on the materials in the newsletter or on any other issues. In addition, for all Oracle Primavera products and PMI issues, please contact us. Editor: Dr. O. Chima Okereke, PhD, MBA

Total Technology Consultants Limited, No. 10 Fourth Avenue, Ihuaku House, Rumuibekwe, Port Harcourt. Phone: 08037100284; Email: [OkerekeOC@aol.com](mailto:OkerekeOC@aol.com)