

Project Management in a Third World Environment

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Second of a Two Part Instalment

This second instalment of this two part series will describe how a project's infrastructure can bring together the six (6) elements discussed in part one.

The project has installed its infrastructure to manage a variety of distant, sub projects steeped in third world conditions and far from the parent organization.

Communications

Recognizing the need for human contact to provide support and direction on work that is complex and detailed to be delivered under harsh living conditions and likely with some risk to personal safety, the project invested in a reliable communications system at the onset of the project with a healthy regard for the necessary start-up and maintenance costs. Information technology and its networks are available everywhere. This project has been preceded by others and it is using established expat IT firms that realized the potential for their markets a long time ago. It established a telephone and e-mail system relying on robust internet connections for the daily conversations, document exchanges, sporadic conference calls and video links on a consistent basis. The personal computers and telephones are state of the art, simply configured, solid enough to endure physical hardships and of low maintenance with easily replaceable parts. The required auxiliary power supplies relying on gas and or solar powered generators are built in with effective surge controls. Since the project is lasting beyond two or three years, a replacement schedule is applied to ensure the system's ongoing integrity. The networking incurs significant costs that are only reasonable if in effect from the project's inception and over its entire lifespan. This exemplary project is partnering with other non-competitive organizations to piggy-back onto their systems by sharing the installation and operating costs with access security for each of the users provided by operating protocols, respective access codes and if necessary, encryption. Finally, since the local human resource pools are new to technology, personnel are recruited with due regard for the prerequisite technological skills, provided with necessary training and are governed by effective protocols to control internet access, e-mail overload and to provide consistent backups and virus controls.

The technological aspects of communications are supplemented by operating practices that provide for brief,

well-managed meetings, communications protocols delineating distribution and inclusion lists and an openness that renders transparent the project's plans and activities.

Shareholders and the parent organization's hierarchy need and will demand reports. The project's multiple layers of operations sustain a reporting architecture that feeds into itself by avoiding the need to duplicate work to patch in supplements. The successive means and layers of reports contribute to a comprehensive product that can be drilled down by the project's hierarchy and corporate offices when and as needed.

Delegation

The organization's head office operates with a mindset that fosters and depends on the application of effective delegation with abhorrence for micro management. This mind set is supported and maintained by operating practices that are articulated by policies and procedures and sustained by a paradigm of philosophy and principles that permeate the organization and its project. The project's leadership and its management personnel are selected and evaluated on the basis of their competence with the varied aspects of delegation.

The skill sets of the project's management and their practices address the critical factors of delegation. This starts with the knowledge that any delegation is a deliberate act that serves to ensure the effective execution of the project's myriad tasks. The burden of delegation remains with the manager who ensures his or her expectations are communicated to a recipient or recipients who are capable of understanding and following through on the required activities while understanding how they will be held accountable for their performance. If necessary, supports such as coaching and encouragement will be provided, but once the flag is past on, the recipient is granted the authority and liberty to do the job. Once the manager lets go, a boundary is established and respected. The manager then monitors progress respectfully, holds people to account in a context of low tolerance for mistakes. Granted, mistakes will be made and risks are involved, but the real skills and judgement of these managers mitigate the risks.

Roles and Responsibilities

The project's delegation and accountability operates within a context of transparency where roles and responsibilities are clear. The project displays an understandable org chart that reflects a vertical hierarchy with a clear chain of command. People know to whom they report and they understand the project's boundaries. The project will attain intermittent bouts of synergy, but it will be through a series of deliberate acts that are mitigating against the disparate personalities from varied cultures, distances and the turn-over of personnel. The project established precise and

individualised job descriptions that are owned by the incumbents and regularly reviewed. Current policies and procedures are clear, understood, officially acknowledged and respected by all. Management operates with a schedule of authorities describing who has rights of approval, of consultation or to be informed about the thousand and one decisions that are being made. Moreover, mechanisms such as effective meetings, tailored communications and reports are in place to foster collaboration and cooperation.

Work Plans

The project is driven by work plans that are an active component in the daily lives of its employees and consultants. Given the range of management competencies within the project the work plans are simple but effective in describing who is to be doing what, how and when and at what cost. Those affected by the work plans review them before they come into effect to suggest changes or indicate their commitment to the plans. As necessary, they receive clear instructions and training on how the plans are maintained and how they apply to the formulation and execution of their designated activities. The plans are broken down from annual to quarterly and monthly components to feed into the reporting architecture and relate to the project's budget and financial reporting system. Problems or setbacks to the plans are communicated to the relevant managers as needed and regular progress is updated by efficient bi-weekly reports that are meticulously reviewed and responded to. A resource or resources are dedicated to the maintenance of the work plans to deliver concise reports to the managers and employees. Participants are held accountable for work plan performance and their over-all performance is evaluated on their work plan achievements.

Human Resources

A basic premise is that the greater the degree of professionalism, the less support provided and greater is the accountability. The project accommodates a wide range of professionalism to manage each employee individually. It started with a recruitment process that selected employees and consultants with the right skills, appropriate health and fitness and the right fit for the terrain and the project's co-workers. The project's hierarchy provides a leadership that is felt throughout the project by the vision the leadership transmits, the corporate culture it fosters and by how it interprets the project's external environment to the actors within. The institutional aspects of labour relations are clearly understood with the project's management supported by sound expertise on local labour laws. Fair compensation and benefits motivate employees to stay with the project and perform, while flexibility is maintained to permit dismissals and replacements for employees who do not perform as needed. As most projects do, this one hopes for synergy, but it works at achieving it in the meantime. It strives for the elusive state of teamwork through deliberate strategies delivered in a supportive environment that enforces zero tolerance on internal conflict. Its management continuously watches for

staff morale by supporting it with rewards, recognition, inclusion and transparency while being acutely wary of those divisive factors that can sink morale; factors like tribal differences, sexism/chauvinism and classism.

Closure

The project's closure is built in at the beginning to avoid pinching off the last year's budget or scrambling for solutions. The project has a plan for closure that calls for confirmation of a last date as soon as possible. The closure plan evolved from a risk assessment to provide contingencies to deal with unexpected closures that could result from political instability or environmental distress. It provides for normal closure to address job terminations, phased departures, the termination of leases, environmental clean-ups, the disposal of physical assets, tax and permit requirements, the flurry of reports and presentations and the maintenance of ongoing security and the transportation of expats. As this plan lies at the ready and when the months will begin to precede closure, the project will be ready to encourage valued participants to stay on to the end by ensuring transparency, providing bonuses, offering supportive references or post project job placements – all in order to avoid a project-end exodus that could close a project in disaster. And for those remaining, the project will be prepared to manage the changing dynamic among employees who will bear the human impact of departures and future uncertainties.

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