

PMGT-502 Reflection

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Effective Communication for Managing Projects

PMGT-502

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This week, I have the opportunity to reflect upon three questions of my choice. For me, the challenges surrounding individual personality traits, virtual teams in today's global workplace, and lessons learned interest me the most. As a project manager, I have to deal with these three topics and am always trying to understand better how I play a role in each, and what I can do to make these situations work to the organization's advantage.

Personality Traits

- What are the benefits and challenges of understanding individual personality traits of members in a project team?

The benefits and challenges of understanding personality traits of team members begin with the simple fact that teams are made up of individuals. Each person may be focused on the same task, but each has their own unique personality. Have you ever wondered why some people just don't work well together? Perrine (2014) mentions that each of us has our own preferences, and operating within these preferences typically allows us to be most efficient, effective, and our most comfortable selves. Conversely, operating outside these limits requires more time and energy and usually results in lower quality work. I must agree that I feel the same way. When I operate within my comfort zone, I can't help but function more efficiently, and when I'm outside of my comfort zone, my workmanship is affected.

Understanding these boundaries, and knowing when you're within or outside them, can improve your productivity, efficiency, and time management skills. The trick to understanding one's boundaries is taking an honest assessment of one's self. The problem faced by project managers is that some people don't want to admit their shortcomings within themselves. To tell you the truth, I'm not comfortable admitting my shortcomings, but being aware of what they are,

I can keep them from impacting my work and the work I perform with others. Perrine (2014) states that “everyone has different preferences that make up their personality type, and some personalities work better together than others. Your particular personality type might make it easy to work with one colleague and leave you struggling with another”.

In week one, I had the unique opportunity to discover my who I was, from a personality point of view. This was nerve racking for me as I’ve always been one of those people who believed I was a certain type of person, but was now faced with having to take a quiz, so to speak, to see if the results would confirm my belief. The Jung assessment revealed I was an Extravert-Sensor-Feeler-Judger (ESFJ).

- Extraverts are outgoing, energetic, and action-oriented.
- Sensors live in the present. They rely on facts, handle practical matters well and like things to be concrete and measurable.
- Feelers let their feelings and emotions play a leading role because of their concern for other people.
- Judgers prefer a lifestyle that is decisive, planned and orderly.

This supported my opinion of myself but did not reveal everything about my personality. What was not revealed were the bad traits such as my ability to be picky, finicky, lazy, and impulsive, depending on the circumstances. Understanding these traits about myself help me understand the benefits and challenges of understanding individual personality traits of members in a project team.

Since the team is made up of individuals, it’s only natural to expect people with similar, and differing personality traits. The benefits of understanding team member personal traits are that some personalities work well together and not with others. Being aware of these differences

can benefit the project team by allowing compatible personalities to team together, thus increasing productivity and efficiency.

Benefits

- Increased productivity
- Increased efficiency
- Harmonious work environment

Challenges

- Honest personal assessment
- Team members make an honest effort to work with differing personalities
- Clashes caused by differing personalities
- How to organize the work amongst differing personalities

Virtual Teams

- What are the challenges of leading virtual teams in today's global workplace? What specific activities would you do to face and overcome these?

Virtual teams are challenging in that the team members cannot engage in face-to-face (FTF) interaction. It's one thing to work side-by-side with someone and develop a bond and trust in their ability and capability, and something entirely different to remotely trust someone you've never met or had the pleasure of getting to know socially. As a result, the level of trust amongst team members, and effective patterns of communication are difficult to develop (Larson & Gray, 2014, pg. 401). The two challenging areas I would like to visit deal with trust and effective communication.

Trust

Webster's dictionary defines trust as reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence. Having to rely on someone you don't know and have probably never met is very difficult. I can understand this feeling. As part of Group 4, a virtual team in PMGT-502, it has been very difficult to sit back and rely on someone I don't know in the hopes that their input to a group assignment won't negatively impact the final score and ultimately my final grade. It is nerve racking to say the very least.

Larson & Gray (2014) first suggest that the Project Manager should try to facilitate at least one FTF during the initial stages of the project and encourage each team member to exchange social information such as their background, experience, and abilities. This will help ease the anxiety related to not knowing someone. I agree. When Group 4 began working together, we decided to meet via Skype, introduce ourselves, and explain our experience as it related to the course subject matter. It was interesting to learn that some of my team members were already employed as project managers and had a great deal of experience.

Secondly, Larson & Gray (2014) suggest that the Project Managers assign roles to each team member, and issue specific tasks so that immediate contribution can be made. I agree and feel that this is something that should happen almost immediately. As each team member sees the contributions of their fellow teammates, they will begin to see their level of reliability and hopefully establish a foundation of trust in their team. Without trust, the entire team fails.

Effective Communication

Effective communication does not merely mean sending an email and hoping the other side views it immediately after it was sent. When dealing with virtual teams, the use of email is not very effective as differing time zones make it impossible for real-time information exchange.

Larson & Gray (2014) mention that emails often fail to convey the feelings behind the facts. I never thought of that before. I must admit that, in my daily work life, I send a lot of emails back and forth to stakeholders of my projects. I now understand what was missing. I never got a chance to convey my feeling of the facts noted within my emails. Perhaps I should have used another media source to convey an effective message.

Fortunately, there are solutions to this challenge. Technology has made it possible to communicate via video conference call and has even advanced to the level of being able to communicate with our cellular devices. I can speak from first-hand experience the value and power of cellular video conferencing. Two weeks ago, I was beginning to develop a chest cold, and it was worsening. Unable to see my primary care physician, I logged into the Doctors on Demand Application on my phone. In less than a minute, I was face-to-face with a doctor based in Colorado. We were able to speak to each other and determine what was needed. After five minutes of conversation, the doctor had sent a prescription to my local pharmacy. While this is not an example related to project communications, it does provide a glimpse into what is possible and how it is possible for two people to come to an understanding and chart a course towards resolution. Even now, I'm communicating, via SLACK and Dropbox, with my team from San Jose, Costa Rica.

Lessons Learned

- How could you keep track of various lessons learned associated with communications in order to apply these to a variety of projects and situations? How could you ensure that you don't make the same error twice?

Lessons learned are only lessons unless you take the time to learn from them. Larson & Gray (2014) state that “lessons learned represent an analysis carried out during and shortly after the project life cycle; they attempt to capture positive and negative project learning.” I must admit, that my organization does not practice this and as a result, we tend to repeat our mistakes. The motion of what we do is so repetitive that we’ve turned projects into cookie cutter templates that work for the most part. This methodology has created a culture that has become more about the financial bottom line than learning from what worked and what didn’t. Perhaps they fail to realize that the financial performance would increase dramatically if we cease repeating failures of the past. I control at least seven projects at any one time and have never had the opportunity to attend any formal training, or have at my disposal a list of lessons learned from previous projects. At this time, the only list that exists is the one I keep for myself, but that does little to help my fellow project managers within the organization.

What’s missing is an independent entity to take ownership and perform project retrospectives. Larson & Gray (2014) indicate that to ensure effectiveness and value, retrospectives must:

- Use an independent facilitator
- Include a minimum of three in-process learning gates during the project life cycle
- Has an owner
- Develops a repository that is easy to use
- Mandates a discipline that ensures retrospectives are used.

It’s important to have an independent person or facilitator to perform the analysis and document what worked and what didn’t. The documenting of “what didn’t work” is likely to cause friction as people don’t like to be reminded of what they did wrong, or perhaps not as right

as it could have been. I must admit, I get kind of flustered when my faults are pointed out but, as I have aged, I realize that we all have these faults and once understood can become a powerful tool for a change. Once understood and documented, these items can help develop the lessons learned and training plan to ensure future projects don't fall prey to the same mistakes.

At this point, we have still not been learned from our mistakes, nor have we made it possible to future project managers to review the recorded data when developing their project management or communication plans. For this to work, management must mandate completion of retrospective training and create a new culture from the top down. Without this support, lessons not learned are just lessons, and mistakes that are doomed to be repeated.

References

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