



Project Management- Is it managing Technical Skills or Human Skills?

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Abstract- With the fast changing world and technological developments, project management as a science and art has developed by leaps and bounds. This article aims to study what are the skills required by a manager to be an excellent project manager. The human skills are analyzed to know its elements. The need and relevance of technical skills in project management is also studied. A dynamic approach to project management is much needed in today's world in order to maintain a competitive edge over others and raise the standards of management.

Keywords: Social Skills, Self Monitoring, Self Esteem, Tools, Methodologies, Dynamic Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Management is an essential part of one's daily life. A person must be able to manage his time, money, human relationships and other resources in the best way to achieve success and contentment. Ever since a social unit of people was formed in order to achieve a goal or accomplish a task, management has been an essential instrument in bringing about conclusive results efficiently. Management is an art, science and profession on its own. Management is an intangible asset in every society. It is multi-dimensional and not restricted to companies or large businesses, but rather management is implied in every aspect of society that requires some form of control, coordination and direction such as hospitals, government bodies, and educational institutions.

Business and Projects require management as an indispensable tool. Management has been identified as a necessity of every organization (commercial or otherwise) that aims at survival, growth and diversification. Management aims at setting and achieving group goals, optimum utilization of available resources, development of a competent economy and society's prosperity. Without proper management, there would be chaos and increase in costs incurred due to unorganized activities. Various studies and researches are undertaken in order to enhance the quality of management and its implications in different fields.

However, management is not an independent concept. Management requires specific activities, tasks, groups, individuals, schedules and operations to be managed.

The art and skill of managing the technical aspects leads to achievement of deadlines and profitability.

The art of managing human resources like employees, staff and colleagues leads is called as human skills or social skills. An efficient manager has impressive social skills in order to extract the required performance from individuals.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Management has been defined by various leading economists in many ways. Here are few of these definitions-

- According to Harold Koontz in his book "The Management Theory Jungle" (1961), "Management is the art of getting things done through and with people in formally organized groups."
- According to Henri Fayol in his book "Industrial and General Administration" (1916), "To manage is to forecast and to plan, to organize, to command, to co-ordinate and to control."
- According to Peter Drucker in his book "The Practice of Management" (1954), "Management is a multi-purpose organ that manages business and manages managers and manages workers and work."

Koontz focuses on management as core social skills whereas Fayol summarizes management as a combination of various technical aspects.

Relevance of Human Skills

Human Skills are management skills that facilitate effective interaction with personnel in the organization. These skills include leadership, communication, decision making and negotiation.

Human skills include:

- Social skills or Interpersonal Skills
- Self-Control and Self-Monitoring
- Self-Esteem

Social skills are personal skills essential for social communication and interaction. Social skills involve three dimensions; seeing, thinking and doing (Kennedy-Moore, 2011). Seeing refers to noting the social situation. Thinking involves interpreting the cause and meaning of others' behaviors. Finally, doing means interacting positively with others based on the social norms of the society.

Interpersonal skills are used by an individual to appropriately interact with others in the external environment. Intrapersonal skills are used to understand and assess one's own values and behave in accordance with those values. Together these skills "overlap and influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions" of an individual (Weiner, 2000).

Self- Control and Self-monitoring: Monitoring one's self helps in adapting to situations quickly and fitting well in social settings. Taking social cues and evaluating other's perception towards your own actions is noticeable in High Self-Monitors (HSM) whereas Low Self-Monitors (LSM) are oblivious to other's feelings and perceptions by acting according to their own desire (Snyder, 1974).

Self Esteem: According to Branden, N. (1969), self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence (a feeling of personal capacity) and self-respect (a feeling of personal worth). Self esteem is a measure of how much we value ourselves. It dictates one's ability to deal with problems, challenging situations and other people.

Human skills are crucial for successful leadership. There is a significant correlation between self-monitoring and leadership where individual personality traits predict leadership perception and emergence (Zaccaro, Foti, Kenny, 1991). Forbes magazine (2012) gives that flexibility to adapt, openness to feedback, and the ability to learn are some defining traits of entrepreneur leadership.

Relevance of Technical knowledge

Technical aspects, operations and procedures require highly skilled professionals that know the subject and its methodology concerning to the task they are employed for. High qualifications and academic excellence is a pre-requisite for those employed for such technical jobs. While skills such as team-spirit, inter-personal skills, honesty, reliability etc. are extremely important but when it comes to jobs that demand technical attention, these skills take a back seat and preference is given to those that show higher proficiency for technicalities rather than such personal skills.

Careers or jobs such as Business Analyst, Mechanical Engineer, Electronics Engineer, Finance Consultant, Economist, Lecturer, and Technology Developer etc. require highly professional and skilled people that possess specializations in their relevant fields. A manager or leader without technical proficiency may prove miserably inefficient when placed in fields that require specializations and knowledge of technical aspects.

Dr. Russell Archibald (2009) states that the objectives of a project manager are two-fold –

- To ensure the project complies with the strategic objectives of the entire organization and contain acceptable risks.
- To plan, execute and control each project effectively and efficiently so that each project achieves its goals on schedule and within budget.

From these objectives, we can infer that the first and foremost objective of a project manager is related to his technical knowledge and skill, in order to ensure that the project is technically feasible, secure and adept.

Dr. Archibald further states, "Too frequently, project failures can be traced directly to unrealistic original technical, cost or schedule targets, and inadequate risk analysis and risk management." From the above mentioned analysis made by Dr. Archibald, we can conclude that project managers need to be not only good managers but also possess excellent strategy development skills, risk management skills and technical abilities.

Furthermore, a report by The Office of Government Commerce - OGC, UK (2009) stated that projects are at a huge risk and failure due to various reasons. One of the top reasons being "a lack of skilled and experienced project personnel and inconsistent understanding of required project activities, roles and responsibilities". These reports directly imply that project managers need not simply manage the project, rather develop and establish a project that is carefully planned and executed, keeping in mind the technical aspects such as schedule, budget, project risk and return etc.

Jennifer Whitt (PMP – 2012) breaks down the skills required by project managers into 2 categories- Behavioral and Technical skills. Behavioral skills include leadership skills such as Change Management, Process Management, Problem solving, Communication, Planning and Organizing, Team Building, Diplomacy etc. On the other hand, Technical skills include

- Tools – knowing anything from Excel spreadsheets to Microsoft Word documents; it's whatever managers need to get things done. Software tools to manage projects effectively and give others accesses too are easy tools for project managers.
- Techniques - knowing how to build a Gantt chart, Decision maps, Radar charts, Control charts or Pareto charts etc.
- Methodology - having a clear methodology for organizing resources, developing strategies and communicating to the team.

III. PROJECT MANAGER'S POSITION

Management is an inherent and fundamental function of a project manager. As the title Project manager suggests,

the elementary duty of a project manager is managing of a project. However, the duties and responsibilities of a project manager exceed its title. The project manager is not required to simply handle the team and its performance, rather he is responsible for developing project strategies, manage project budget and schedule along with communicating efficiently with the team members, sponsors, stakeholders and all the other parties involved.

A project manager must have a balance of human skills as well as technical skills. A manager possessing only human skills may form good interpersonal relations with employees but will not achieve the objectives efficiently. On the other hand, a manager who has only technical knowledge lacking in social skills, fails to lead his team and manage employees, thereby not achieving his objectives efficiently. In both the cases, the project manager fails as a good leader.

According to Hartman (2008), a project manager therefore, needs to prepare his mind for dynamic management. A project manager that practices dynamic management of the projects expands the entire scope of the project along with its profit margins. Human resource management is better within the project as well as time constraints are easily managed. A dynamic approach to project management is much needed in today's world in order to maintain a competitive edge over others and raise the standards of management.

IV. DYNAMIC MANAGEMENT

Hartman (2008) identifies various traits that are extremely necessary in a project manager with a dynamic mind. These include pattern recognition and decision making, relationship building and communication, integrity and trust along with wisdom and intuition to be a dynamic manager that can handle complex projects with proficiency. The most important of these skills is effective communication and decision making.

The research of Gido and Clements (2008) places strong emphasis on communication and its techniques during project management. Moreover, it can be concluded from their research that effective and frequent communication is crucial for identifying potential problems and taking corrective measures when necessary. Decision making is another important attribute that a project manager must possess. Decisions can make or break a project and can change the whole project scenario. Therefore, project managers must be able to analyze information and take good decisions.

Apart from these skills, a project manager must also be highly flexible in his approach. Flexibility is the willingness of the project manager to alter and explore different alternative courses of action that are best suitable for the project, keeping in mind the business needs, environmental factors and customer preferences. A traditional or conventional mindset of managers might lead to failure of innovation and adaptability.

A good Project manager must also commit to, and demonstrate highly ethical behavior. A strong ethical and moral character of the project manager inspires the entire team and sets an example for team members to follow. Integrity, empathy, honesty, patience, respecting others etc. are some ethical principles that every dynamic project manager must possess. Creating such standards of conduct is a moral responsibility of managers. It leads to motivation and a positive environment within the project. It enables the organization to be dynamic as it establishes measures to minimize the effect of drastic changes in the environment. A proficient manager also helps in realizing personal objectives of employees by motivation through financial and non-financial incentives.

While a project manager must be flexible and ethical, Hartman (2008) focuses on wisdom and intuition as important attributes that prepare the mind of a project manager for dynamic management. Wisdom comes from experience and an experienced project manager is definitely better equipped when it comes to handling project deviations, dealing with grievances, cost and budget estimations etc. However, intuition is a gut-feeling that arises as an immediate response when dealing with uncertain situations. Intuitions are personal in nature and are internal perceptions of reality. Professional intuitions influence the decision of the manager and how he reacts to a possible risk or opportunity. For most people, intuition can be risky and should not be relied on entirely as a prime decision making tool. For increased chances of success, professional decisions and approach must be based on skills and experiences that the project manager has gathered over the years rather than using intuition as a basis for decision making. However, Intuition can be used as backup mechanism in cases where other skills and past experience fails to help. Therefore, intuitions do play a role in project management but it is limited to the extent of the manager's personal experiences, background, knowledge and circumstances. In cases where such a dynamic approach is overlooked, it may result in inefficient performances and a lack of proper control and coordination.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall, we can notice that management has a diverse nature and is not restricted to a particular structure, subject or nation. The practice of management is, therefore, an art which is best applicable with principles based on science of management along with professional managers that are competent to manage activities in the corporate world. We can conclude by saying that management as an art and science, are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other.

Project managers need to be highly skilled individuals and possess both managerial abilities along with technical prowess. Not only this, project managers have an obligation to harmoniously manage the project team

and develop efficient communication within the team members as well as with the project sponsor, stakeholders and other involved parties. Moreover, a technically skilled project manager can better manage the technicalities of various operations as compared to a naïve manager.

Poor role clarity may be an issue that some project managers suffer which directly affects the motivation and performance of project team members and particularly when it relates to project manager responsibilities. Therefore, project managers must be dynamic. Dynamic management is targeted at raising the standards of management and empowers the project manager to deal with complex situations. It develops a sense of competitiveness and a will to excel among managers at all levels.

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