People Side of Modern Project Management

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Abstract

This paper is about people related aspects of project management. Every project starts with recruiting people into the project. Then follows selection, induction, setting objectives, work allocation and performance appraisals, etc. People in the project communicate with each other. The communication path can be horizontal, vertical (upward or downward). This paper explains majority of the people related processes in the project. Also it explains the issues they face while communicating with each other, involving in conflicts, resolving conflicts and getting out of conflicts. This paper discusses the post implementation activities of performance appraisals such as training and development. This paper also discusses the concepts of finding high performers in the project, reward and recognition system, moving team members across projects and releasing team members from the project, etc.

Introduction

There are millions of dollars spend on different projects every year across the globe. All these projects are being executed by the men and machines (women too!). There is merely any project being executed without human resources involved in the project. Hence, the people are most important in the project environment. A project becomes successful or failure because of people issues (majority of times). Hence, people side of project management has significant importance in project management area. This paper is all about it.
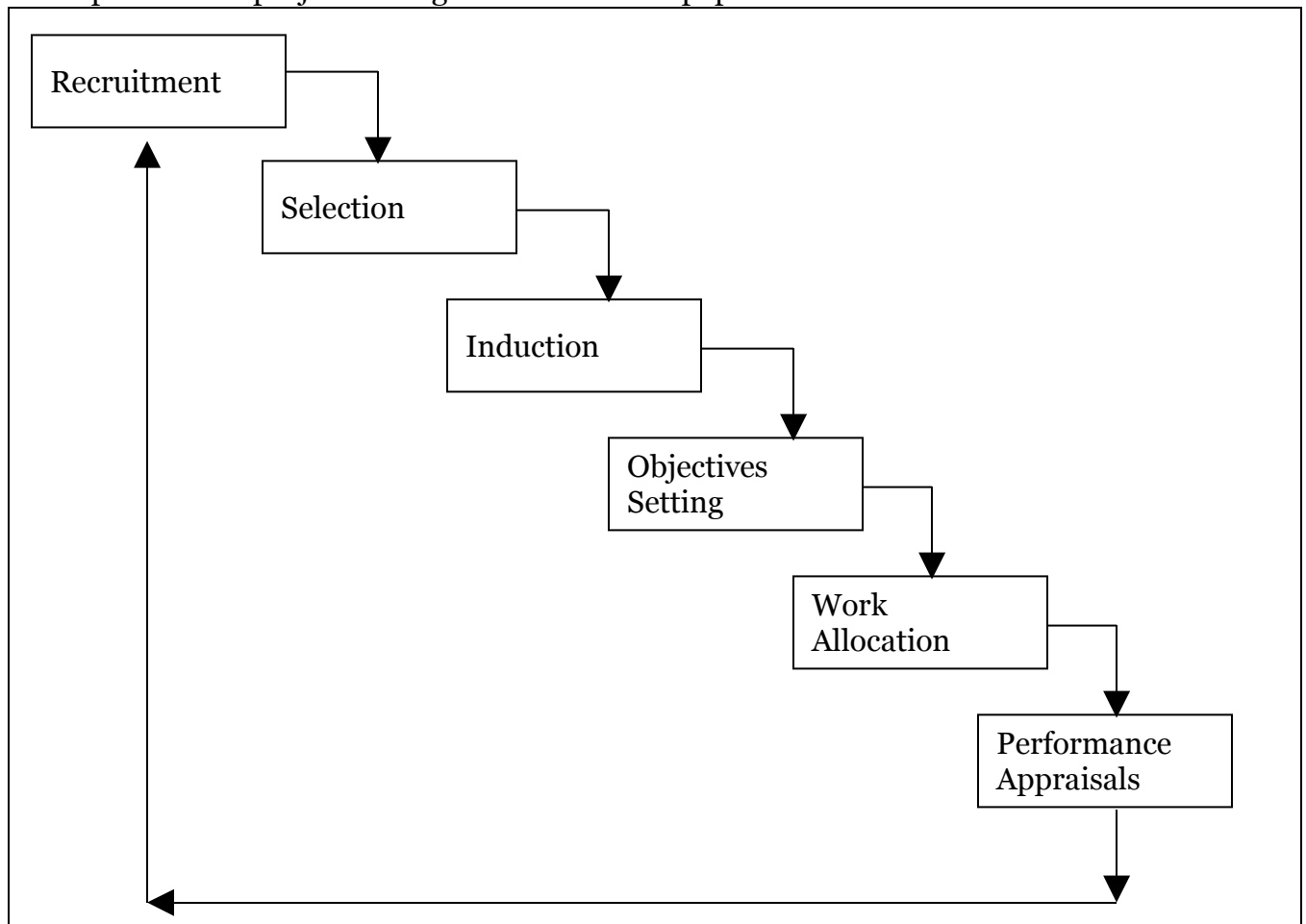

Fig 1: People Related Processes in Project Environment

Recruitment

Recruitment is the first step in people aspects of project management. The project starts with by taking people into the system. First the project management team advertises about the vacancies in the project to the external world. Whether it is internal recruitment or external recruitment, the management team notifies the vacancies to the outer world. The probable candidates then apply to the vacancies. The project management team selects the suitable candidates from the available candidate pool. Usually selection into the project may come through the organizational HR process or by direct selection tests of the project. Usually there are different types of selection tests. They are aptitude tests and personality tests. Aptitude tests test the candidate's numerical, logical, critical reasoning and analytical skills. Personality tests include psychometric tests. Usually in IT organizations, for programmer positions, different projects follow different tests. Some may conduct written tests in specific programming language and other may conduct interviews for selection purposes.

Induction

Once the candidate is selected, he comes on board the organization and subsequently into the project. First the HR department of the organization gives the organization level induction to the candidates. Once this is over, the candidate joins the specific project formally. Then project manager provides him the induction training into the project. This induction specifically communicates the common terminology the project uses or any ground rules already in place in the project to the newly joined team member. This way the newly joined team member comes to know about the project, people in the project and little bit about the processes involved in the project and the organization. Usually induction happens after the introductions of new team members are over with the other existing team members. Usually senior members of the project, the project management team, team leaders, technical leaders or architects involve in giving the induction to the new team members.

Once the formal induction is over, the newly joined team member will be in a position to learn the project documentation and he is aware of the sources of information in the project. After few weeks, he starts working on the given tasks for him under the guidance of the manager and the architect. Here the project manager and technical lead plays key roles in making the new team member feel comfortable in the project. This is very much required for the team member to become long timer in the project or the organization.

Setting Objectives

Once the induction is over, it is better to set the formal goals and objectives to the new team member. Usually the project manager sets the objectives to the team member for the coming appraisal period or for the coming one-year time. These objectives will be documented and filed with the HR department of the

organization. This process is very much needed because the team member's performance needs to be evaluated at the time of performance appraisals against these objectives set earlier. Hence, objectives setting process is a very much important for individual team member's development. Usually individual's objectives are set based on the organization's and project's objectives and goals.

Work Allocation

Once goal setting is over, the individual comes to know what is expected out of him in the coming six months to one-year time. Then the project manager assigns the tasks from the work break down structure to the team members. That is, the project manager delegates the work to the team members based on the project plan. Delegation of work needs lot of courage from the project manager's side.

While accepting the work, the individual team members exhibit different behavior in different situations. One accepts the work, without even thinking about the outcome of the work. The other member may simply reject to the assigned work. The other member negotiates and then accepts the given task. The other member may delay the acceptance of the assigned task. The other member may transfer the task on to another member. Like this different team members exhibit different behavior in different circumstances base on the nature of the task, and environmental circumstances.

Because of this, the project manager should take into consideration of the interests of the team members and their past experiences into consideration while assigning tasks to the team members. Once tasks the delegated, the team members start executing the assigned tasks and update the progress to the project manager.

While executing the tasks also different team members exhibit different behavior. This behavior is based on the level of knowledge of the team member on the given task, his confidence level, time constraints, customer pressure, peer pressure and his relationship with his project manager. All these factors can effect the individual's behavior while executing the given project tasks. Usually the confident team members deliver the results without even informing the hurdles they encountered while executing the tasks. To reach this level is based on the knowledge of the individual, his practice over the specific technology and understanding of the systems and subsystems interconnections, etc.

Communicating with other team members

Usually team members come under two categories. Either they are Introvert or Extravert. Introverts in technical teams remain with the books and manuals, when they encounter technical problems, they try to explore on their own with the help of manuals. Where as extraverts immediately discuss the technical problem they are encountering in the project with the other team members and then try to find the solution for their problem. Sometimes introverts may stress

on perfection in dealing with technical issues. These kinds of behavior we observe in technical teams in the projects.

Usually in the projects, team members communicate with each other formally or informally. This communication flows horizontally and vertically in the project. In horizontal communication, team members communicate with their peers over technical matters. The vertical communication may flow over upward or downward direction. The technical leaders communicate with their managers and subordinates in the project environment.

Over all, the project manager in the project has to excel human relations in his team. Because he will be talking to the team members regularly, he should have good communication, and leadership skills.

Facing Conflicts

In team environment, there is possibility for conflicts among team members in the project. Some of the conflicts may have positive out come and result into more productive ideas. Some of the conflicts may have negative impact on the project and its team members. Hence, it depends on the way we handle the conflict. Hence, the project manager should have the conflict resolution skills.

A *conflicting* situation is one in which two or more parties look for the outcome to come in their favor. Then the manager has to facilitate and try to resolve the conflicting situation. There can be many reasons for conflicts. The resources, schedules, project issues, technical issues, administrative procedures, project costs, performance appraisals and personality issues, etc can be the some of the reasons for conflicts. If the team member is not happy with his peer then also he exhibits anger over his supervisor. If the team member is not happy with any of the company policies or procedures, then also he exhibits different behavior on his immediate supervisor.

If the team member involves in conflict with his manager, he then skips the hierarchy and then reports to his manager's manager. The best way for the team member is to take his manager to his manager's manager desk and discuss the issue in picture, instead of just complaining to the senior manager individually. Then the senior manager will be in a position to understand both the parties in one go, instead of hearing to individual versions separately. Here the senior manager uses his conflict resolution techniques in resolving the conflicts between team members and project managers in his team.

Conflict Resolution Techniques

Once conflict occurs, the manager can use conflict resolution techniques against his team members in conflict. The conflict resolution techniques include

- Confrontation
- Compromise

- Smoothing
- Forcing and
- Withdrawal

Using *Confrontation* technique, one keeps the facts and figures in picture and resolves the conflict. This technique creates win-win situation for the parties in conflicting situation.

In *Compromise,* technique both the parties goes a step backward and settle the situation.

In *smoothing* technique, the parties in conflict discuss the situation and goes back to their cubicles thinking that the conflicting is resolved. After spending some time, they think that the conflict still exists and it was not resolved earlier. This technique may not be recommended all the times.

Using *Forcing* technique, the manager can force his team members and win the argument. This creates win-loose situation. This may not be applied all the times.

Another conflict resolution technique, *Withdrawal,* using this technique one just withdraws from the argument. Then the other party wins the argument. This creates loose-win situation.

Using these conflict resolution techniques one can come out of the conflicts and can make the conflicts useful for productivity improvement purposes.

Becoming Performer
After comfortable in the team, one becomes performer. To become one team member as performer, there are many factors, which effect him on the way. The manager plays a key role here. The peers, manager, support teams, quality team, customer, his family, his financial situation have effect on the performance on new team member in addition to his confidence level and level of knowledge on the technologies. The cooperation from his fellow team members also influences the productivity of the individual in a team environment. In high technology areas it is the support and encouragement the project manager gives to his team members produces the results. Particularly in high technology areas the engineers need moral support in doing their work.

Meeting Project Needs
The manager has to check whether each project team member is meeting the project requirements or not. This is possible with the regular reviews of the team member's work by the project management team. We can expect more productivity when the individual's goals and interests match with the project goals.

Performance Appraisals

Once team member spends considerable about of time in the project, it is time to evaluate his performance against the objectives set earlier. This is the job of his manager, peers and subordinates (in case of 360 degree feedback). Usually different companies follow different performance appraisal methods to evaluate team member's performance. Usually self-appraisal, supervisors appraisal and reviewer's comments will be there in this process. In majority of the IT organizations, for team members' performance appraisal, the manger will give the feedback. For middle level managers, 360-degree feedback is taken. It varies form organization to organization.

The main objective of these performance appraisals is to find out the training needs of individual team member and to check whether he is meeting the project and organizational objectives or not. We can observe many conflicting situations in the case of performance appraisal discussions in the organization. Promotions, demotions, salary hikes and Transfers in the organization are based on the performance appraisals.

Motivating Team Members

Motivating the knowledge workers such as IT engineers is a challenging task for the project manager. Majority of the times, the knowledge worker is self-managed. However the manager has to motivate and encourage his team members. Some of the motivating activities the managers in IT industry can do are mentioned below.

- Sending programmers to a seminar or conference in latest technologies
- Giving work in their interested areas instead of legacy systems
- Giving project bonus and frenzy benefits
- Giving onsite assignments and sending them abroad
- Giving cross functional assignments
- Moving across teams
- Moving across different technologies
- Moving across different customer accounts

Training & Development

Based on the performance appraisals, we can identify the training needs of the specific team member. Once we have done the appraisals for all team members, the project manager can update the training plan for the team member. The HR department comes up with training calendars once they receive all appraisals forms from the respective project managers. The team members can be provided training in latest technologies and on project need basis. Some of the IT companies made certain days of training mandatory to the software engineers in

their organizations. This is needed for the development for the individual and also useful for new coming up projects of the organization.

Moving Between Projects

Once a team member spend sufficient time in one project, it is better to move him to the other project in the organization. This change is good for the long-term benefit of the team member. Similarly it is best practice to move the project managers across different customer accounts. With this managers learn diversified skills and cultures.

It is better to move the team member to another project, if he is not confident of the technologies in which he is currently working and if he is under performing. Some times, if the organization gets a key project from a new customer, then also they pick key team members from different projects and form a new team for the new customer. Hence, the project manager has to use his negotiation skills in retaining and acquiring key team members.

Reward and Recognition

Once should find key performers on the project. Some of the IT companies use different techniques to identify top 10% and bottom 10% in the organization. Similarly the project manager has to identify key team members in his project. One should have proper reward and recognition system in place in the project. Some of the IT companies have this reward and recognition system at the organization level and at the project level as well. Identifying the start performer in the project, employee of the quarter and employee of the month are some of the good rewards the IT firms are having these days.

Releasing Team Members

We should know when to release team members from project. In following scenarios, we can release team members from the project.

- Project becomes operations
- Project is stopped by the customer in the middle
- Project is complete, customer is happy and communicated to all stakeholders by the project manager
- Resources of this project are moved to another key project
- The senior management stops resources to this project. This is known as *starvation*.

Conclusion

In this paper, we saw the key processes involved in people side of modern project management. In a project based organization or matrix organization, it is common to move team members across projects once project is over. When we

are dealing with people in the projects, it is better to follow the steps mentioned in this paper. This is good for both the development of team members and the organization.

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G.P.Sudhakar currently working as Consulting Editor at ICFAI Books, ICFAI Research Center, ICFAI University, Hyderabad. Earlier, he spent 12 years in IT industry. He worked in USA, UK, Ireland, Finland and India. He has Bachelor of Science, Master of Computer Applications, Master of Technology and Executive MBA. He is Project Management Institute, USA certified Project Management Professional (PMP). He is currently pursuing PhD in Business Administration from All Indian Management Association-Aligarh Muslim Univerisity. He is member of All India Management Association. He worked as employee or Consultant to companies such as IBM, SIEMENS, Interwoven, Wipro Technologies, Citicorp, Nokia, Salomon Smith Barney, SIAC, DSET Corporation, IONA Technologies, Birla-Horizons International, and PCL Mindware. He held both managerial and technical roles in IT industry. He worked as Project Manager at Citicorp Overseas Software Ltd(COSL), Hyderbad during 2001-03. He worked as Systems Manager at Wipro Technologies during 1999-01. He has extensive product development, project management, test management, and program management experience. He has publications in Management. His articles were published in The Hindu, Indian Management, Businessgyan, Business & Management, Express Computer, Projects & Profits, The Global Educator, Computers Today and CSI Communications. He has written a book titled Business Essentials for Software Professionals.

He worked as Executive Vice President and President of VSPGS alumni association. He is recipient of Government of India Scholarship for 18 months

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In his spare time, He spends with his family in Hyderabad. He is married with a daughter. He tries food in different restaurants and travels a lot to explore the places.