

Common Mistakes in Managing Virtual Project Teams

These teams are composed of people separated by vast distances who communicate primarily by computer and telephone. While project teams have gone "virtual", the project management practices have not changed much to accommodate the nature of these teams. As a result, project managers, program managers, project sponsors etc., tend to make mistakes when dealing with virtual project teams. Many of these mistakes are due to inexperience in managing virtual teams and the inability of managers to work around cultural differences. The common mistakes are;

- Assuming that everyone on the team will just get along and work together.
- Many project managers do not understand that in a virtual team, it takes more time for establishing team norms. Virtual teams suffer from prolonged team storming due to cultural differences and communication difficulties.

The management team assumes that they know what the team members want to hear. This is common in cross-cultural teams when project managers are from one culture and the team members are from other cultures. In such cases, the managers tend to implement top-down communication - without listening to what the members have to say. Face-to-face meetings are costly and can be avoided. Most managers are worried about the budget and avoid face-to-face meetings. The manager's experience in leading small projects would have thought him/her that electronic communication tools alone are enough to

build trust among team members. While this is true in small projects, it may prove disastrous in large complex projects. Employ an identical approach in all locations. Managers in global projects often fail to accommodate regional differences in their plans. Most managers are scared that their schedule will go haywire if they have to make exceptions for different locations. Managers often lack awareness of regional differences - such as public holidays, religious holidays, planned shutdowns etc., thus forcing a common approach in all locations. There is no time to celebrate milestones. Most projects will be carried out under tight time schedules and sometimes projects will be behind schedule. Project managers often bypass celebrating project milestones - to save on time! This has a major demoralizing effect on the team and tends to increase team attrition. Forget to recognize good work. Project managers in virtual teams often do not get to see other team members on a regular basis and will be too busy to acknowledge that the members' contributions are making a positive difference. This has a demoralizing effect on the entire team - particularly team members who are in distant locations. Virtual teams are tough to manage. Often, managers are promoted from small co-located teams to manage large multi-national, multi-cultural and virtual project teams. The managers often lack the cultural awareness and lack sensitivity to the needs of a virtual team which results in some of the common mistakes. Project managers of large virtual teams must be equipped to handle these challenges - either through mentoring, training, and coaching.

- Arun Kottolli, M.S, MBA
<http://arunkottolli.blogspot.com>

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Invitation

For February 2007 Edition

Please share your thoughts and experiences for the next newsletter that would be of interest to the PM Community. Articles should be original and about 350 to 600 words in length. Mail your contributions to pmessence@pmibangalorechapter.org



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Editor's note

On behalf of PMI Bangalore Chapter, I am pleased to share the January 2007 edition of PM Essence. We had a dream of bringing this out to make a meaningful difference to the community we live in. We have made a humble beginning and continue with the untiring efforts of many volunteers and authors who are making this happen, in spite of their busy schedules and stretched timelines. If you want to meet any of them, do drop into any of our PM Footprints session held twice a month. We are gearing ourselves up for making this a steady state process, building up a repository of excellent, valuable articles, making it participative and adding value to everyone. I invite you to send in your articles at pmessence@pmibangalorechapter.org.



Thanks & Regards
 Madhavan, Editor
 Director, PMI Bangalore Chapter

Four Keys to the Science of Success

Every January, as we look ahead to the New Year, we think about our success - both personal and professional. We write down our resolutions, but what many of us fail to do is break down those resolutions and think about how we're going to make them happen.

This "how" is what I call the "Science of Success." It's the connective tissue that begins with the vision and ends with gratitude. Here are the four keys to the Science of Success as I've experienced them at work and at home.

1) Vision

It's a word that scares some people because it sounds like the purview of CEOs and professors, but it is a word for every one of us to own. If you don't know what success looks like, how will you get there? It sounds simple, but most people have a hard time articulating what success looks like to them. Take a clean sheet of paper and answer the question for yourself: what is success for you?

Does it mean working less hours and having more time for your family? Does it mean working smarter and being more effective? Does it mean having a

house in the country? Does it mean going back to school for another degree or more training?

Think of your vision as your charter. It's where you want to go. It's the view from the top of the mountain. Now, let's focus on getting there.

2) Learning

If you look at successful people, you'll notice one consistent theme: a love for learning. People who make it to the top of the mountain take great joy in learning all the way up to the summit. They'll often tell you that they learn more from the failures, and that in fact, it is usually a failure that opens the window to the opportunity. Sounds curious, but if you think about it, the difference is perspective: having a perspective that is based on learning.

If every stone in the path up that mountain is an opportunity to learn something, then the journey is a rich experience. At Cheetah Learning, we often receive letters from our students after they have passed the PMP exam, and after reflecting on their experience in the classroom, they realize that they learned a lot more than how to pass an exam. They learn skills about life, success and how to learn faster and better.

3) Project Management

You have a vision with a perspective based on continuous learning. Now, the question is: how to be effective? How do you



Michelle LaBrosse

An attitude of gratitude

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translate what you learn and know so it helps you get where you're going? That's Project Management. Project Management is the art of getting things done.

As many people see vision as part of the CEO's world, Project Management is often seen as only one department's world. "Project Management is for those guys in IT or Manufacturing or..." That is one of the biggest myths of Project Management. Like vision, it is also for every one. After all, what is life, but a series of projects? If we are living and breathing, then we are surrounded by projects. Project Management gives us the knowledge and the skills to be more effective. It gives us the systems to marry the vision and learning and link, it all together to get results. Whether you are a teacher, a mechanic or a manager in any department, we all need results to get the momentum that is the difference between standing still and moving ahead. That's why we call ourselves "Cheetahs." Like the Cheetah we believe in getting to where we want to go fast.

4) Gratitude

You can't turn around without seeing a book about relationship building, customer relationship management, or how to build better relationships. The "R" word seems to be everywhere as the great elixir for success. However, I would take it one step further. We all have relationships of varying success, but how many of us have gratitude and show gratitude to others? This is not the new age "mumbo-jumbo." Instead, it is recognizing and appealing to the most basic human emotional need: to be recognized, to be thanked, to matter to the person next to us. At Cheetah, we call this "an attitude of gratitude." An attitude of gratitude is infectious. It lets people feel good both by giving and receiving. There is a reason that people thank others in acceptance speeches because they are grateful for the people, ideas and energy that helped move them forward.

So, let's look at where we've been. You have your vision and you know where you're going. You are embracing life with a learning perspective where you see every obstacle as an opportunity. You're going to flex your Project Management muscle to get where you're going faster and better, and along the way and especially once you get there, you'll always take the time to thank others and help other people in their journey.

You are ready to climb! Let's go. I'll see you at the top. Here is to a great 2007.

*Michelle LaBrosse, PME,
Chief Cheetah,
Cheetah Learning*

FOOTPRINTS SESSIONS

PHOTO FEATURE



Launch of the PMI Newsletter



Volunteers & Contributors Meet on 18th December 2006



Rharat's presentation during a Footprints Session

Events Calendar

Date	Topic	Presenter
25th Jan 07	Critical Chain Project Management complementing the PMBOK Processes	Mr. Rajasekhar R Nandyala, BE, MBA, PMP Proventures India
Completed Programs		
11th Jan 07	A product development methodology using agile concepts	Mr. Murali Manohar Setlur, PMP, Mphasis BFL Limited
28th Dec 06	Reliability Model for Project Management	Mr. Bharath S, PMP, Alcatel Development India
14th Dec 06	Effective Project Management through PM tools	Mr.S.Subramanian,PMP, IBM Certified Project Manager, IBM India Pvt Ltd.
30th Nov 06	Active Risk Management	Dr Nalini Omtri, Ph.D., PMP Covansys Global Technology Services (India)
16th Nov 06	Integrated Visioning of the Project Leader-Manager's Role	Ms. Kavita Singh
2nd Nov 06	Innovation through Business	Mr. Sreenath Iyengar IBM India Private Limited

Getting to know your team better!

Every team is a mix of members having varied work culture and diverse behaviours. Based on certain common and predictable patterns of behaviour, the members can be placed in the following categories.

Follower

This type of people follows the leader blindly all the time. They are not worried about the pros and cons of the situation. They just follow the leader. People who have had long term association with the leader exhibit such behaviour.

Supporter

There will be some people in the team who support their leader all the time. This type of behavior can be exhibited by some of the members in large teams. Every time these people support their leader with their explicit comments. This is because they may be expecting favours from the leader or they assume that in the given situation, the leader is correct.

Challenger

This category of people challenges the leader all the time during discussions. Initially, they exhibit resistance and challenge whatever the leader says, after negotiation, they accept whatever the leader is saying. This type of behavior can be observed against new leaders/managers. After the team members become comfortable with leader and the relationship improves this kind of behavior may reduce. Some people remain as challengers during the entire project based on their relationship with the leader.

Modifier

This type of people suggests modifications to the points

of discussion. They try to manipulate what the leader is saying and arrive to a compromise only after a discussion. But they definitely need some modification in ideas or strategies that the leader has come up.

Denier

Denier is someone who denies whatever his leader is saying all the time. This behavior is exhibited from the team member because he is not happy with the organization policies, team structure, work, schedules, resources, or lacks technical knowledge. This guy may require some kind of training and counseling sometimes. Other reasons could include denial of salary hike as promised or lack of career growth.

Franker

This type of people gives constructive feedback to the leader all the time. They appreciate the leader if he/she is correct. They also do not agree if the leader is wrong. They provide practical feedback every time. For them, the point of discussion is important. They look for the benefit of the organization or the team. We can observe the above behaviors usually in team discussions and meetings. We cannot judge someone as an acceptor all the time. This pattern may change according to the situation and team members behave based on the situation. They may be an acceptor at one time and challenger another time. But these are the common patterns people usually exhibit. So watch out!

*G.P.Sudhakar, PMP
Product Manager, Canarys Automations Ltd*



PM Footprints

This forum is hosted by PMI Bangalore chapter for the benefit of project management community. The content will comprise of a speech/presentation on contemporary PM topics of interest across the industry. The program presentation will be for about an hour followed with interactions amongst fellow PM community. The program will provide a great opportunity for both the people desirous of presenting their works/papers to share their learning and also for the participants. Contact: Mr.Krishnamurthy at 22370400 / 9886814078