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“Team where *People Matter*”

A Project Management Pattern

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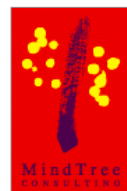
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Abstract

We live in a world full of projects. Businesses and organizations are more focused on projects than ever, seeing them as a way of delivering new capabilities internally and to customers. However, projects are not trivial. Teams are under greater pressure than ever to deliver more, under increasingly tight constraints. They must work in the context of: tighter regulatory compliance (e.g. Sarbanes-Oxley), pressure on cost reduction, cultural barriers (e.g. outsourcing, global teams) and sometimes with large teams. Projects may also involve significant technical complexity, imposing even more stress on Project Managers and their teams.

Projects are about people. They involve stakeholders who benefit from the project outcomes and who need to sign-off and approve on the project. They also involve your project team members. Any work that they do for the team is fundamentally connected to how well they work by themselves, and together in a team. When the people in your team are not managed properly and not supported as people in a team (rather than interchangeable cogs), you will end up not getting the best from them.

This is the stage where the Project Manager should take control. A Project Manager is responsible to take care of three aspects: Process, Technology and People. If any of these is poorly dealt, the development of the project (and the organization) will suffer. Hence, a Project Manager is required to be more "people-intensive". He should be capable enough to resolve the issues that his team might encounter.

This paper presents a Project Management Pattern, which would help a Project Manager build a people centric team. The pattern targets the people issues in any organization and suggests ways to resolve them. The design of the pattern is generic and not specific to any industry. A Project Manager can customize the same (if required) to cater to the needs of the project. During its complete lifecycle, at some stages the pattern makes use of other sub-patterns, which are globally accepted in the Project Management pattern community. These patterns would be highlighted as and when we encounter them.

1. Introduction

“Team where People Matter”

When a team is setup to execute a project, very (in some cases, none) little care is taken to address the people matters. To have better chances to successfully complete the project, it is imperative that we build a team where “*people*” matters.

In this context, “*build*” is not just about getting the necessary people for executing a project. It is much more than that. It is about *team bonding*, building *team morale*, getting the team *focused towards a common goal*, *mentoring* the team and getting the *best out of them*. Last but not the least; it is about building the team for *self* as well as *organizational development*.

“Team where People Matter” can be categorized as a **Project Management Pattern**.

“Team where People Matter” can be further sub-categorized into **Behavioral Pattern**.

2. Context

In the current competitive environment, timely delivery of a project is gaining importance in any customer’s book. To achieve this, organizations are under tremendous pressure to complete the project as per the committed deadlines. Past experience shows that some of the major issues that a Project Manager faces in executing a project are misunderstanding of requirements, lack of necessary resources, team conflicts, over utilized budget, project behind schedule, low productivity, attrition. The list is endless. The idea here is to show that projects do face issues related to cost, resources, people and each had to be dealt separately for resolution.

Due to the fast paced work environment, organizations are becoming “more” project-centric compared to people-centric. Here, “project-centric” refers that the Project Manager is too much worried about the project delivery rather than thinking about the factors that drive the successful completion of the project.

This pattern would focus on people issues and suggest ways to resolve them. People are a fundamental part of any project and people management a critical component of Project Management. If a Project Manager is not able to manage his / her team, the project “**will**” fail. Most of the people related issues like team conflicts, low productivity, attrition (and many others) can be addressed if the Project Manager spends little more time on building a team where people matters. However, it is important to note that a balance has to be maintained between being “project-centric” and being “people-centric”. Overdose of any one of them would result in failure of the project.

3. Problem

Listed below are some of the problems an individual face due to the project-centric approach of many organizations:

1. Due to work pressures, most of the times the team members become ignorant to the fact that there is life beyond work. This over-working leads to frustration of the team member that translates into low morale of the team member.
2. Criticism by the superiors in an open forum sometimes leads to feeling of loneliness among the team members. They feel as if they have done something terribly wrong and this feeling of guiltiness might translate into lack of productivity.
3. Increasing frustration and lack of productivity leads to lack of focus of the team member.
4. Sometimes a team member actually does not know why are they doing a particular project. They are given particular tasks by their superiors, which they complete within the given period. This lack of business knowledge leads to decrease in satisfaction, which in turn leads to attrition.
5. Sometimes a team member would not know what actually they would gain at the end of the project. The superiors also might not make an effort to inform the team member about his self-development path. This leads to an unsatisfied team member who does not know his well-defined career growth path.

4. How to implement?

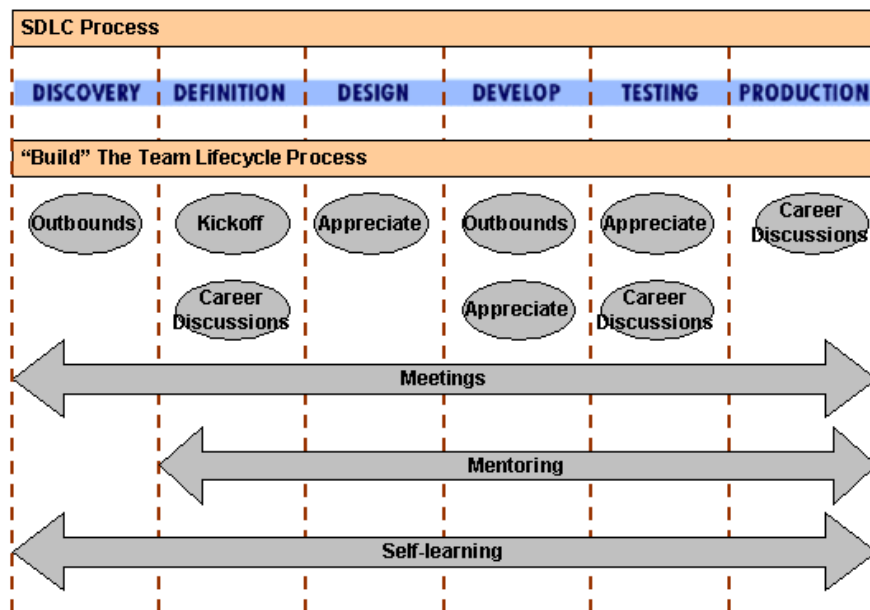
In this section, we list down the various activities that can be used to implement the pattern in real life scenario. Each activity would have a primary function to fulfill. Each activity also fulfills other secondary functions. However, those would be visible during their collaboration with each other.

Activity	Primary Function
Outbound Training	Team Bonding
Appreciation	Increasing Morale
Mentoring	Increasing Trust
Career Discussions	Clear Development Path
Team Meetings	Increasing Team Focus
Formal Project Kickoff	Knowing the Customer
Self-Learning Initiatives	Increasing job satisfaction

These are the basic list of activities that can be used to implement the pattern. Note that there are no boundaries for this pattern. You can add more activities to this list, which you think can help you to build a team with people focus.

Whatever methodology you decide to use, it should be able to achieve the main objective of the pattern i.e. *build a people centric team*.

The collaboration between the activities can be best depicted using a real life example of how the pattern can be implemented. We would consider the scenario of the software industry to show how the various activities interact (or are linked) with each other. We would also show where each activity holds a place in the project lifecycle (SDLC). Even though each activity is not a core process of the project life cycle, it definitely helps in the successful completion of every phase of the SDLC.



The above diagram depicts the correlation between the Software Development Lifecycle (SDLC) and the Pattern lifecycle. As depicted in the diagram, each pattern component holds a significant importance in the respective SDLC stage. *Note that every activity is useful at each stage of the SDLC life-cycle; however the primary function of the component is efficiently utilized in selective SDLC stages.*

Example: In Definition stage, the “Kickoff Meeting” is the primary component. This is the most important activity in this stage. Without a “Kickoff Meeting”, it is very difficult to understand the customer’s need for the project. This would in turn lead to lack of business knowledge among the team. In addition, “Meetings”, “Mentoring” and “Self-Learning” act as primary component since without these it is difficult to achieve the desired job-satisfaction level among the team members.

5. Consequences

What will happen if we focus on the people side?

1. It would involve huge time and effort from our side. People are complex creatures to manage. However, be assured, you are focusing on the right problem. It is easier to focus on project spreadsheets, budgets, resource plans and earned value management. Unfortunately, that would be the wrong thing to focus on. Remember this: "Projects = People".
2. People see that you are leading by example. They see that you are focusing on them and they will respond to that. People respond to people engaging with them. This would help in increasing the motivation levels of the team.
3. If people observe that their manager takes interest in their career, it would create a level of trust between the two. The team would then start approaching the manager to discuss other non-project related talks like career discussions, growth path and so on.
4. For younger project members, they may expect the project manager to be "doing technical things". They may feel that the PM is not doing enough and just spending time "hanging out with people".

This is something that needs to be corrected, and younger project members need to learn that a PM needs to be managing people, rather than "doing technical stuff".

6. Known Uses

Listed below is one of the known uses of the pattern:

Career Discussions

I joined MindTree as a Project Manager. As part of the appraisal cycle, all the team members were required to fill in their role-based objectives, organizational objectives and personal objectives. I planned to have a one-on-one discussion with each team member to discuss their objectives and how they would help them in their career growth. During the discussions, one thing that came out was that most of them were actually not sure of what career path they would follow. One common reason that they mentioned was that no one actually told them about the growth options. I took this as an action item for me and explained each one of them the plusses and minuses of each growth path that is available in MindTree. I also told that the basic job responsibility for each role.

I feel such career discussions should be a regular feature whenever a new project kicks off. It gives a clear picture to each MindTree mind where they currently stand and more importantly tell them the kind of tasks they need to undertake to be prepared for the next level.

7. Related Patterns

Item	Description
Compensate Success	<p>The pattern talks about rewarding individuals as well as teams for their contribution in successful completion of a project.</p> <p>This pattern can be a component of the current pattern</p>
Recommitment Meeting	<p>The pattern talks about conducting a review meeting of the status of the project and getting the commitment all the concerned to the new plan / schedule.</p> <p>The component "Team Meeting" can also be a component of this pattern.</p>

8. References & Acknowledgement

Reference site	Description
http://hillside.net	Used to refer the language for writing patterns
White Paper on "Patterns for Developing Effective Concept Prototypes" by <i>Carol L. Stimmel</i>	Referred for the concept prototypes in the paper
People and patterns: A case study	This paper shows that good knowledge management is good risk management and vice versa and that, both hinge on effective communications.
http://www.easycomp.org/cgi-bin/OrgPatterns?search=TheRoleOfManagement	The Role of Management in organizational patterns
Importance of Patterns & Antipatterns in People & Project Management	Presentation by Dr. R. Srinivasan at the 23rd National IT Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka
http://www.easycomp.org/cgi-bin/OrgPatterns?ProjectManagementPatternLanguage	Used for initial reference site for Project Management Pattern identification