

Welcome to The Psychology of Project Management!

Copyright ©1993-2011 Infocept Systems, Inc.
Revised January 2011

Introduction

It's important to recognize what is happening emotionally to the project leader, the team, the sponsors and affected organizations(s) as a project progresses through its life cycle since projects usually cause change and change causes interpersonal and organizational conflict.

Projects are *staffed* by people and *affect* people in different ways. People will behave differently depending on where they are and what role they play in the project life cycle. It is also important to note that project outcomes are affected by people's behaviors. The project members and project leaders themselves, because of their diverse backgrounds and own perceptions need to be formed into a trusting, high-performance team – all rowing in the same direction.

More information concerning how the project sponsors, project team and affected organizations mentally progress through the life cycle of a project can be found in our Project Management for IT Course and CD.

Change Management and Politics

The fear of change is a people issue ranging from entry-level staff to seasoned executives.

There will be loyalty to the antiquated systems you will be replacing, no matter how limited or outdated they may be. Senior staff will be the key endorsers of the new system; and end users will ultimately be the determining factor in making your system implementation successful. Therefore, Project (Attitude) Change Management must also be managed accordingly.

Active and passive resistance are as much a part of projects as project management tools. Remember that your project is intrusive; it's causing change, it's upsetting the apple cart, and it's challenging the heroes in the organizations who thrill in doing things the old way so they could swoop down from the heavens at the last moment to save the day with their specific knowledge of age-old traditions. Often times the heroes are greatly respected by the leadership team for their feats of danger and will whisper bad things about your project to influential people. How do you deal with this phenomenon? Spreading knowledge and offensive politics (next section) are the keys. Resistance is based on fear and fear is based on lack of knowledge. The key here is to constantly communicate, educate and train. Head off the fear by being proactive and visible.

Try to involve the heroes, let them be part of the solution. Active resisters can be dealt easily; but keep an eye out for the passive resistor - you've got to be street-smart to catch this guy, but when you find him, educate and train - douse the fear factor.

The *politics* issue is almost never discussed as a Critical Success Factor for projects, but is real and must be dealt with. Politics is based on dealing squarely with fact and obliquely with emotion. Project politics is divided into defensive and offensive modes. The defensive mode is used in response to an issue that someone "puts out there" for you to defend - it could be a person threatened by the project, a hero blowing ill words in some ones ear, or a bad situation (project slippage, overruns, etc.). These items must be dealt with fact first, and then the emotion. The offensive politics strategy uses preemptive communications, education, personal touch, favor-trading or whatever to build confidence and trust in you and your project. So even if the bad stuff happens - and it will, you'll be ahead of the political curve a bit. Work the room like it's a performance.

The Project Leader

Ultimately, team leadership requires a special set of skills. These are essential to motivate the team. Some of the requirements for good project leadership include:

- Creating alignment
- Coordinating resources and managing decisions
- Facilitating group discussions
- Enhancing and maintaining trust
- Encouraging ownership by the team members

Helpful tactical techniques to help your team include:

- Clearly define tasks (instructions, deadlines, special considerations)
- Provide the needed information and materials (background, references)
- Assign (and *announce*) authority (limits on decision making, etc.)
- Set clear goals (what is expected, due dates)
- Follow-up (status meetings, checkpoints, offer of assistance)
- Give rewards / credit for successful task completion (publicly, privately, promptly); and to both the team leads and their often-forgiving *wives*!

The Project Team

Remember that the project team is an ad-hoc collection of diverse individuals, ripped away from their comfy jobs and brought together for the purpose of completing a thankless job of implementing and transitioning your project into reality. How well you motivate depends on your personality, personal style and passion in the belief of your project. People will follow your lead, but you have to lead!

Reward often, even if small awards. The value of the reward to the individual and team is in the message of what you're doing, not the actual cash value awarded. Also make sure that individual's real manager knows the good (or bad) job the person is doing so that appropriate adjustments can be made to annual performance and salary reviews. Also remember to reward for Team behavior; individual rewards are OK, but remember that you don't want heroes, you want a **Team!**

If you have inherited an existing team, recognize that there are four types of teams or organizations. Your strategy will depend upon what your starting point is:

- Reactive (survival, protective, fault-finding, self-centered)
- Responsive (sets goals, action plans, problem-solving)
- Proactive (sets missions/objectives, long-range plans, manage performance)
- High-Performing (identify potentials, strategic navigation, managed evolution)
- Action plans towards high-performance depend on what your starting point is

If you are building a new team from scratch, then recognize that new teams progress through four basic stages of formation:

- Forming: Team members are excited about the potential opportunities of working together
- Storming: Team members experience increased interpersonal conflict as issues are openly discussed and different feelings about the project agenda and leadership surface
- Norming: Team differences start to get resolved and there is a sense of moving forward; the team begins to share ideas, feelings and actions related to completing tasks; an openness emerges as morale improves
- Performing: The team is highly task and person-oriented; harmony for its own sake is replaced by individual freedom and strong emphasis on productivity

The Project Sponsors

It is important to sustain their support, commitment, and involvement. These will ebb and flow throughout the project life cycle. Other helpful tips include:

- Getting them to visibly demonstrate support and commitment
- Keeping surprises to a minimum
- Promote education and training to ease fear and uncertainty
- Keeping the sponsors actively engaged – get their ‘skin’ in the game!
- Managing expectations and scope with the project sponsors
- Constantly get them to market the project (staff meetings, annual meetings, newsletters, etc.)
- Establish a communications rhythm with the project sponsors – and especially with the leadership of the affected organizations – your chief source of potential resistance

The Affected Organization

The affected organization(s) (*organizations that will be most affected by the long-term changes that your project will introduce*) will progress through as much change as the project team. You will typically run up against five typical organizational ‘personalities’ and listed below are a series of strategies that may help to eventually gain their support, participation and commitment:

- Your Project Allies: High trust / high agreement
 - Affirm agreement on the project
 - Reaffirm the quality of the relationship
 - Acknowledge the doubts and vulnerability that exists with respect to the project
 - Ask for advice and support
- Your Project Opponents: High trust / low agreement
 - Reaffirm the quality of the relationship and the fact that it is based on trust
 - State your position
 - State in a neutral way what you think their position is
 - Engage in some form of problem solving
- Your Project Bedfellows: Low trust / high agreement
 - Reaffirm the agreement and acknowledge the caution that exists

- Be clear about what you want from bedfellows in terms of working together; ask the same of them
- Try to reach some agreement on how you are going to work together

- Your Project Fence-sitters: Low trust / unknown agreement
 - State your position on the project
 - Ask where they stand - apply gentle pressure
 - Encourage them to think about the project and what it would take for them to give you support

- Your Project Adversaries: Low trust / low agreement
 - State your vision for the project
 - State in a neutral way your best understanding of their position
 - Identify your own contribution to the problem
 - End the session with your plans and no demands

Summary - Successful Implementation Techniques

The successful implementation of large scale projects depends upon four key factors – the proper make-up of the project team, a solid process for buy-in and knowledge transition to the owning entity, recognition of the resistive forces that constantly challenge the success of projects and a process to ease the implementation disruption. These techniques begin on the first day of the project and they must consider the human element involved:

The Team... The first step is to have the proper team representation from the user community that will ultimately be responsible for the new system. This could be line managers, even vendors and clients of the affected process area. It's a good idea to get them on the project team early as workers, ambassadors, potential implementers and eventual caretakers of the changes left behind by the new system and process. Having them on the team ensures getting the right requirements, quells any political issues and gives you a pool of implementation talent for the deployment phase.

The Process... Follow the Quality Assurance Review process, especially the various Quality Checklists and the voting process before proceeding to the next project phase. This ensures due-process and asks for a vote of confidence from the team reps before proceeding with each additional phase of the project.

The Enemy Within... Projects will be challenged by those organizational warlords most threatened by the project's success. The approach is to recognize the issues and deal with them as appropriate. Sometimes the head-on approach will work, sometimes guerrilla tactics are called for. You'll have to judge the right tactic for each individual or situation. Most certainly, an approach that uses the proper representation and is air-tight from a process standpoint will help the situation.

Easing Disruption - The CBEEs... The Construction Battalion Combat Engineers or "Sea-Bees" were often landed ahead of assault landing forces in WWII to clear mines, construct airfields and so on. On especially difficult and repetitive deployments, you may actually **want** to use this technique. Groom your line of business team reps from the outset to be your advance troops or contact liaisons with the areas affected most by your implementation. Empower your CBEEs to communicate early and ease user apprehension. Use fool-proof implementation checklists, and get out there well ahead of implementation day to 'clear the beaches' of any issues.