

PROJECT KICK-OFF MEETING

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Introduction

A project kick-off meeting is the best opportunity for a project manager to energize his or her team. During this meeting, the project management can establish a sense of common goal and start understanding each individual.

Although a project kick-off meeting appears to be a simple meeting with all the stakeholders of the project, a successful project kick-off meeting requires proper planning.

The following steps are some of the important preparation points for a successful project kick-off meeting. These steps help you to stay focused, establish and demonstrate leadership, and help integrating individual members into the project team.

The Agenda

A strong and clear agenda is a must for a project kick-off meeting. If you have no clue of what the agenda should be, ask your experienced subordinates or get hold of some of the agendas used for earlier kick-off meetings by others.

The agenda usually includes purpose of the project, deliverables and goals, key success factors of the project, communication plan, and the project plan.

In advance to the project kick-off meeting, make sure that you circulate the meeting agenda to all the participants.

This way, all the participants are aware of the structure and what to achieve at the end of the meeting.

Getting Started

When the meeting starts, the project manager should take charge of the meeting. Next, all the participants should be welcomed and a round of self-introduction should take place.

Although you have already shared the meeting agenda with the participants, briefly take them through the agenda while giving a brief introduction to each item in the agenda.

Pay more attention towards introducing the project roles and emphasize the reasons why the team members were assigned to respective roles.

If there are people playing stretched roles, acknowledge about it. When you do all these things, do not go into detail. The purpose of this meeting is to take everyone on to the same platform.

Project Presentation

Once the tone is set, present the agenda in a structured manner. First of all, talk about the project assumptions and how you developed the project plan.

Present your reasoning behind the plan and convey the message that you are open to suggestions when the project progresses. Go through each task in the project plan and elaborate sufficiently.

Emphasize the fact that the project plan and the schedule are still at the initial stage and that you are expecting everyone's assistance for making it complete.

Identify and acknowledge the potential bottlenecks or challenging tasks in the project schedule.

Setting the Expectations

Decide on a convenient time to hold regular meetings to talk about project progress. Emphasize the need of everyone's participation for the regular meetings.

Teamwork is one of the most important expectations to be set. You need to elaborate more on

teamwork and plan some teamwork activities just after the project kick-off.

Talk about the time sensitive nature of the project and how the leaves are granted during the project period.

If the project requires working long hours, letting them know in advance and showing them how you can help them to maintain the work-life balance is a good strategy.

During the meeting, empower the team members to carry out certain tasks and make them responsible.

Communication Plan

Communication is one of the main aspects of a project. Therefore, the project kick-off meeting should emphasize more on the communication plan for the project.

This usually includes the meetings and escalation paths. Following are some of the meetings that take place during the project life cycle:

- Weekly status meeting
- Project plan updates
- Task and activity planning sessions
- Management updates

In addition, you can emphasize on the other communications channels such as e-mail communications, forums, etc.

Feedback and Closure

At the end of the kick-off meeting, open up a Q&A session that allows the team members to freely express themselves.

If the time is not enough to facilitate all the team members, ask them to send their queries and feedback via e-mail. Once you have a look at those e-mails, you can set up another discussion to address those.

Never drag a planned meeting too much, since it could be a bad example. Before everyone leaves, summarize the meeting and call out the action items and next steps.

Conclusion

To conclude, there are four main areas that should be emphasized about holding project kick-off meetings.

- Be prepared for the kick-off meeting. Demonstrate your ability to organize and lead.
- Empower your team members. Assign them responsibilities.
- Develop and nurture teamwork.
- Demonstrate your leadership qualities.

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