

PROJECT LESSONS LEARNED

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Introduction

Projects vary in terms of purpose, cost, magnitude and the timelines involved.

Yet, they all have common features and the lessons learned from one project can easily be incorporated in another, circumstances permitting.

Some of the experience thus gleaned is revealed below. This is by no means an extensive list of all the project lessons learned, but a few of the most relevant, are stated herewith:

20 Useful Project Lessons Learned

- The success of a project is largely dependent on the skills and strengths of the people involved. Therefore, a project needs to have a dedicated, talented set of individuals working towards a common goal.
- Together with leadership skills, the project manager needs to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her staff, so that the talents are harnessed and the shortfalls downplayed for the benefit of the project.
- A champion team and a team of champions are indeed different. The former would lead to a successful project whilst the latter would yield to a conflict of egos, each chasing an individual goal.
- It pays to know who the decision makers are. Such individuals may not always be readily visible, but they will be calling the shots, so developing a strong line of communication with such individuals will reap benefits in the long run.
- If you have the knowledge and experience to make a decision, then you should go ahead and so, without expecting top managers to spoon feed you at every turn.
- Procrastination does not work. After assimilating the relevant information, decisions need to be made. Wrong decisions can be salvaged, if discovered early; but right decisions cannot be postponed. So, *Carpe Diem, seizetheday*, as advocated by the popular maxim.
- When things go wrong, as they invariably will; excuses will not work. Find an alternative course of action or remedial propositions instead. Allocating blame only causes dissention and hostility, searching for solutions will bring the team together.
- Be pro-active in your approach. Reactivity is just not good enough.
- Be open to change. Sometimes, you may find that the things you knew along may not be correct at this given time, under these specific conditions.
- Know what resources are available. Not just those under your purview but those which are at the discretion of other teams. Sometimes, others may be happy to help. After all, the *favor bank* concept which is colloquially referred to as the 'you scratch my back and I will scratch yours' philosophy, is apparent in the business world too.
- Paperwork and documentation are necessary for reporting purposes. But when making decisions, placing too much reliance on data which may have changed within a surprisingly short timeframe pays few dividends, especially in an unpredictable environment.
- Know your customer and know the objectives of the project at hand. If any significant changes need to be made, do so, but remember you need to consult the customer first.
- Respect your leader and his/her decisions. Sometimes, you may not agree with these. That is fine. Voice your objections, especially if they are reasonable. But once an action has been decided upon, even if it is contrary to your idea of what should have been done, support it, and try to make it a success.

- Take account of all the known facts. Try to make sense of it, but don't blindly force-fit scenarios into a pre-established mould. Such scenarios may have been right before, and will, in all likelihood, be right once again, but maybe just not in this case.
- Do not be afraid of taking calculated risks. After all, as the adage goes, *a ship is safe in the harbor, but that is not what ships were built for.*
- When things go wrong, know who you can turn to for help.
- Always disclose information to those, who will need it. This is not the time or place for obtaining an edge over another by keeping crucial data close to your chest. People, who know what is expected of them and have the means of doing so, will play a pivotal role in making the project a success.
- Use modern technology and time tested management skills to your advantage.
- Good communication is that which will stop mistakes from becoming failures. Mistakes happen and recovery is always possible. But failure is a dead-end street.
- Do not blindly rush into decisions. Careful thought needs to be given to the circumstances at hand prior to engaging in decision making. This will save time in the long run by minimizing the need to redo work.

Conclusion

Repetitive mistakes are the best avoided. Project lessons learned should be documented so that future team leaders can make use of the learning experience of others in order to avoid the same pitfalls themselves.

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