

## **The “P” in Project Management**

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The PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013 held earlier this month was attended by more than 800 participants from the region. Indeed, the symposium covered a wide spectrum of topics ranging from the importance of the Project Management Office (PMO), successful negotiations in procurements, project management in the light of sustainability considerations to tools and techniques for innovative and successful project execution that are important for project management practitioners and project team members.

However, one common theme emerged during the two-day event which is the human element or “People” in project management.

Although projects are increasingly more challenging due to the complex nature of the deliverables, needs for tighter alignment with corporate strategic objectives, and overheads arising from matrix and cross-functional reporting structures within project and organisation structures; the human aspects in project management have surfaced as one of the key successful factors that warrants timely attention.

The short review below is based on the author’s participation in selected track activities during the 2013 annual symposium.

### **Human Resource Crisis**

According to Beth Partleton<sup>1</sup>, she shared that it is projected that there will be 15 million projects in 11 countries by 2020 but her concern is that US\$344B in terms of GDP will be at risks due to the lack of competent resources. Her view was echoed by Kim Seeling Smith<sup>2</sup> who shared that the world will be facing a 30-year crisis in human resources in about 2028 when experienced workers who are retiring in those years are not suitably replaced with experienced staff. Another troubling statistics she shared was the concern that 85 million jobs available in 2020 face the risk of not being filled by competent staff.

In the Singapore context, Kim pointed out that a recent study by Hay Group showed that attrition rate in Singapore climbed to 15.5% in 2013 compared to 14.1% in 2012. And only slightly over one-quarter (28%) of the Singaporean work force are highly engaged compared to the worldwide average of 36%. Since it costs 50% to 200% of a staff’s annual salary to get a replacement, Kim emphasized the needs to actively engage staff starting from the interview/selection process to onboarding, compensation, communication and providing timely feedback. While these statistics cut across the different industries, companies would be more pressed to recruit the right project leaders/members and retain them.

### **The Art of Negotiation, Influencing and Managing Conflicts**

Negotiation is part of our daily lives and the ability to negotiate to obtain desired project outcome is critical for all project leaders and team members. In addition, it is even more challenging when the project leader or his member has to influence the outcome without the assigned authority. In this regard, Regina Chua<sup>3</sup> shared with us how to prepare a “regret-free” plan that include a Plan B, a clear trigger for the “walk-away” position, identifying what constitutes as a significant value to the other party in terms of concessions to be given away and the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZONA).

To influence without authority, different styles: aggressive, assertive, passive, etc will have to be adopted for different situation but at all times, the influencing person must show confidence and resist to submit to scare tactics. And persuading like a "saint" calls for being likeable – showing empathy, offering options and creating value for the other party.

There are many tell-tale signs of conflict at play and Matthys<sup>4</sup> highlighted some which include: people "shutting-down" during discussions, sudden or frequent emotional outburst, blaming constantly, over generation of negative issues, clashing frames and indulgence of sarcasm. Since conflicts cannot be avoided in projects, there is the need to manage conflicting situation in a constructive manner which involves active engagement and "dis-arming" the situation. This can be done by the removal of fear of blame and seeking a common ground. From this perspective, it is critical to understand from the needs of the other party, manage "face-saving" and solving the problem jointly but not necessarily agreeing on the principles.

### **Can EQ be learned?**

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is as important as IQ when building stronger relationship, succeeding at work and achieving personal and career goals. Using his personal experience and those of his clients, Dominic<sup>5</sup> shared that personal motivation is typically influence by Pain or Pleasure. Contextually, a person with high IQ would focus on achieving output whereas a high EQ individual will seek to achieve the desired outcome.

There are four Emotional Competencies that affect our level of EQ: (1) Social Awareness: understanding what is happening around us and the ability to sense the power dynamics in groups or organisations (2) Relationship Management: forging strong relationship in social, private and official environment (3) Self-Awareness: knowing what affects our emotion and thoughts and how to influence them and (4) Self-Management: controlling our impulsive feelings and managing our emotions in a positive manner to deliver on our commitments. In a nutshell, Dominic summarized the process that involves focusing on the positive aspects, being aware and managing our emotions, taking positive action and reviewing the results (outcome).

### **Would you want to work with You?**

Brenda Bence<sup>6</sup>, author of the new book with the same title related an important lesson she learned from John Pepper, former Chairman and CEO, P&G when he advised that those executives who failed to make it to the highest levels of the organisations are those who stopped being "coachable". This important insight has been instrumental in changing Brenda's perspective and how she subsequently guided numerous leaders as part of her executive coaching career.

In the short one hour, Brenda emphasized the importance for executive to build an individual leadership brand of his/herself – a brand that shows what the leaders stand for. This was achieved through the use of exercises and tools to illustrate the differences between using closed and open-ended questioning techniques to uncover issues faced by staff, practising the 5 levels of focus: Vision, Planning, Details, Problems and Drama and why a leader should transit between 4 leadership styles depending on the situation: (1) Democratic/Participative (2) Bureaucratic (3) Charismatic and (4) Autocratic style of leadership. Brenda concluded by saying that if one wishes to advance in one's career and rise to position of greater responsibility, one must think about the experience "YOU" offer as a leader.

### **The Spider Man, Kung Fu Master and More...**

What is the key difference between a project manager and project leader?

The short answer according to Jeremie Averous<sup>7</sup> is that the former is focused on "doing things right" while the latter want to "do the right things".

Besides this main difference, Jeremie also shared the various key roles that a good project leader will have to manage to achieve the project results that are aligned with the organisation's strategic goals. In the role of the "Spider", the project leader is at the centre weaving the network ensuring that all the relevant stakeholders are being covered and relationships amongst all participants are managed.

Opposite to the emotional aspect of the "Spider", the "Kung Fu" master role demands that the project leader identify the specialists in the project team early – these specialists are the ones who will provide the technical competencies but bearing in mind that there must be discipline to ensure that these specialists do not delved into too much details that missed the overall project goals. From Jeremie's experience, many project failures are attributed to one missing piece in the puzzle and hence the role of the "Entrepreneur" role in the project is to ensure that appropriate investments are made earlier for future returns. For a start, project leader could challenge the team to stop doing one thing a day and identify one thing to invest in. The other important project role is that of the "Team Coach" so as to build an effective team while the "People Catalyst" role will constantly ensure that the project team will not be buried under the project issues and hence, missing the mighty oak in the acorn.

### **Condensed Ideas**

It is quite common for many to mistaken the "P" in project management for either the "Project" itself or the 5 "Process Groups" needed for initiation, planning, executing, monitoring & controlling and closing off a project. While these Process Groups and Knowledge Areas are key success factors to ensure the proper governance of managing projects, the soft skills in project management are increasingly become paramount in ensuring project success.

The human aspects and attributes in project leaders ranging from leadership styles, conflict management, motivation abilities, negotiating skills, influencing without authority, art of listening and communication, just to name a few make up the "P" in successful project management implementation.

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### **References:**

<sup>1</sup> Beth Partleton, "The Strategic PMO", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 9 Oct 2013

<sup>2</sup> Kim Seeling Smith, "5 Cs that will revolutionised your ability to recruit, engage and retain staff in today's social age", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 9 Oct 2013

<sup>3</sup> Regina Chua, "From Fragile to Agile: thriving in conflict and distributions for your project management", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 9 Oct 2013

<sup>4</sup> Matthys J Fourie, "How to 'Maverick' a project from failure to success", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 9 Oct 2013

<sup>5</sup> Dominic Siow, "The High EQ Leader – Aligning hearts and minds for exceptional project outcomes", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 9 Oct 2013

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Bence, "Would You Want to Work with YOU: Proven strategies to help project leader motivate and inspire others to get more done, faster", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 10 Oct 2013

<sup>7</sup> Jeremie Averous, "Project Soft Power – Discover the secrets of the great project leaders", PMI Singapore Annual Symposium 2013, 10 Oct 2013

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