19. MANAGING PRODUCTION

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Project management 101 *by Zavanak*

19.4 Aspects of management

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Keeping focused

With so much going on inside a busy project, it is difficult to stay focused on what really matters.

Set goals for the day, the week and the month ahead

Consciously track progress against them

Have a to-do list

Judge what to do, and what to delegate

Allocate time to tackle specific tasks

Complete today's tasks today

Check messages from time to time, not continually

Establish a familiar, but not rigid, routine

Keep the desk and your devices free of clutter

Take lunch, go for a walk

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Meetings

Routine | **Formal** | Ad hoc | **Emergency** | Gatherings

- **Provide information**
- Share information
- **Examine a problem together**
- Review progress
- **Review the status of issues and risks**
- Assign actions

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Regular project meetings

Topic	Typical frequency
Immediate situation, urgent concerns	Daily
Progress against plans and objectives	Weekly
Issues and risk management	Weekly
Change control review	Fortnightly
Informal review with customer project manager	Fortnightly
Budget and resources review	Monthly
Project quality review	Monthly
Project board	Monthly or bi-monthly
Executive presentation	Quarterly

Any meeting is expensive in work hours – keep attendance and duration to a necessary minimum

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Maximising meetings

Pre-meet – tackle contentious issues with key stakeholders beforehand and avoid conflict in the meeting

Check value – ask participants to say what they expect, and at the end whether they have got it.

Set strict limits – for most meetings no more than 30 minutes, no more than 7 people

Seek everyone's input – have pauses to digest information, encourage quieter people to contribute

Make it matter – clear objective, effective chair, circulate pre-reading beforehand, circulate minutes promptly

Have everyone stand (recognising that some people can't) – tends to make meetings shorter and participants can't multi-mask doing emails etc.

Manage time – start and finish on schedule (end early if possible)

Off-line – take difficult questions away to tackle, then come back to agree resolution

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Managing messaging

Managing outbound

Every message should be essential

The title should signal the content

The first sentence should summarise the message

The message should be as short as possible

And have a clear call to action

Use attachments for detailed information

Keep recipients to a minimum – who really needs to know?

Managing inbound

Set aside specific periods to deal with emails

Respond promptly but not instantly – sleep on it if need be

Be careful who you reply to – be wary of *Reply All*

Keep your inbox almost empty

Use folders to keep important emails easy to find

Store downloads in folders

Don't be available 24/7

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Site visits and set pieces

Bring key stakeholders to the project to show progress.

A set piece event is a chance to thank the team at a critical achievement point.

Organisers must be sure the event is not unfairly stage-managed to give a false impression.

An event might also be held to confront punctuated equilibrium.

Photo: Govia.blog.hu

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Stuff happens

Identified risks materialise

Skills or resources are unavailable when needed

The client changes the baseline

Unexpected events happen

Labour problems occur

Interaction costs increase

The plan proves to be flawed

A prior decision fails

Individual performance is inadequate

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Decision-making

Anyone having to achieve progress through the work of other people will have to make decisions to maintain progress.

Value genuine experience, dependable data and rigorous analysis.

Encourage vigorous but objective challenge and discussion.

Involve others in the decision whenever possible but avoid groupthink.

Be open to ideas and valid concerns from junior members of the team.

Use project governance and the project board as checks on the most significant or critical decisions.

Be decisive. Maybe a quarter of your decisions will be wrong anyway.

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Decision drivers

Emotion – feelings and sensitivities among people close to the decision	Attitudes	**Values** – the influence of cultural, religious and moral principles
Experience – awareness of what has worked in the past and what to avoid	Knowledge	**Training** – in decision-making as well as technical aspects
Intuition – so-called gut instinct, actually a product of other drivers	Mentality	**Objectivity** – using only data to produce a solution
Very urgent, critical	Timeframe	Not urgent but **very significant**
Little or no opportunity to consult or involve others	Advice	Opportunity to consult and involve others in formulating the solution
Believing a previous effective decision must work in a new situation	Blind spots	Obstinately insisting our decision must be the right one

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Take the decision, and own it

If you can, sleep on the decision before committing to it.

There is never enough data in the time available.

In too many cases the solution will be sub-optimal but the best available in the circumstances.

Take responsibility.

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Endorsing other people's decisions

Take great care endorsing other people's decisions

Apply critical thinking:

- **Was the decision reached through a sensible process?**
- Does the decision reflect the quality of the data available to support it and the risks associated with it?
- **What is the motivation of the person asking for your endorsement?**

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Controlling cash

Cash is the life-blood of the project. Keeping it flowing smoothly in and out is critical to project delivery.

Cash in:

- Budget allocations
- **Grants**
- Borrowing
- **Stage payments**

Cash out:

- Labour and materials
- **Fees and charges**
- Travel and other expenses
- **Utilities and telecoms**

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Ensuring efficient cash flow

- Maintain a realistic cashflow forecast
- **Monitor cashflow closely**
- Eliminate reasons for non-payment
- **Continually review costs and look for savings**
- Keep stock levels to a minimum, but have sensible buffer stocks where appropriate
- **Lease or rent rather than buy equipment if it makes sense**
- Similarly, decide whether hiring a contractor is wiser than hiring someone full-time
- **Strike a balance between prudence and parsimony**

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Crimping costs

When costs must be curtailed, the manager must make decisive, if unpopular, decisions.

- Restrictions on discretionary spending
- **Pressure on suppliers to cut prices**
- Travel bans
- **Bans on hiring external contractors**
- Cancellation of training
- **No working overtime**

Clumsy cost-cutting may actually increase costs

It may offend the client (e.g. banning travel to meet them face to face)

© Eric Woodcock 2024

Project management 101 *by Zavanak*

© Eric Woodcock 2024