

## Assessing Your Project Management Expertise

Whether you're a CIO, an IT manager responsible for projects, or a project manager, assessing your level of project management expertise, developing an action plan for dealing with problem areas is an important task that's often overlooked.

Projects are a key component of most business environments; unfortunately, the IT sector still relies heavily on project managers learning their trade through trial and error. While learning through mistakes can be an effective tool, it's a very expensive training process. With this approach, it's no wonder statistics quoted by experts such as the Standish group state that over 60% of projects are over budget and late! In spite of this, the IT industry continues to focus on improving the systems delivery process and regularly leaves project management improvement out of the equation.

Implementation of tools is often the typical solution to a perception that project managers need some help. Unfortunately, focusing on improving the development process and implementing project management tools doesn't usually address the cause of the problem. Another solution often used is to replace the project manager when a failure occurs. While this may work for some organizations, it's often risky and expensive; you can never be sure a new project manager will perform any better than your existing one, until you 'throw them off the deep end'! A more effective solution is to improve project manager's skills by providing a process that allows them to learn new skills but minimizes the risk to the business.

Assessing whether your project management skills require upgrading can be tricky. When was the last time you heard a project manager say they've just finished a project that was over budget and schedule? However, statistics gathered from senior management tell a different story. This surely points out project managers aren't as good at what they do as they let on, or they're somewhat defensive about their skills. Neither is very surprising; no one wants to admit they may have some deficiencies. Add to that, project managers are held responsible for the success of their projects; a failed project is often viewed as catastrophic to a project manager's career.

The first step in determining if you should consider implementing processes to improve your project management expertise is to determine if you have a need. Following is a set of questions you should consider in this assessment.

- Are your projects regularly over budget or over schedule?
- Are you consistently seeing scope creep on your projects?
- Does your staff end up working excessive hours to heroically bring in a project on time?
- Does the business community feel that your projects are not meeting their business needs?
- Are your project managers unable to tell you clearly the project status (e.g., what's left to complete, budget used/left, issues).
- Do you find your project managers constantly reacting to project issues rather than proactively managing potential risks?
- Are non-project resources consistently blamed when issues are identified?

Answering 'yes' to any of the above while blaming something outside of your control is not acceptable. Project managers and executives/managers responsible for projects are looked upon as the professionals responsible for successful projects, regardless of the obstacles. Often, most of the problems described above are due to skill deficiencies in the project manager.

You also need to assess the experience level of your project managers. How many projects have they managed? What size and type of projects have they handled? You also need to look at how they will view upgrading their skills. To

effectively improve the skill level of your project managers, you need to get them to buy into whatever approaches you want to implement.

The solution to improving your project management expertise may require implementing a number of solutions, over a period of time. One or all of the following approaches may be needed.

- Use a senior project manager to manage key projects; junior project managers handle sub projects and get guidance and direction from the senior project manager. While the main objective is to complete the project, a clear objective is to transfer knowledge to the junior staff.
- Implement a 'shadow' project manager program where regular 'pulse taking' by a senior project manager can help more junior project managers.
- Provide project management training courses and follow-up sessions over a prolonged period.
- Implement a Quality Management program for your Project Managers where all key deliverables are reviewed by a peer group or a senior project manager.
- Implement a Project Management Office. This is often viewed as something that creates excessive overhead; however, when implemented in controlled stages, focusing on the needs of the department, it is highly cost effective.

Each of these solutions can be implemented in phases. They can be tuned to suit the company's culture. If you are a CIO or senior IT manager, you typically have the ability to implement these solutions as part of the process you use to upgrade your staff's skills. If you are a Project Manager who recognizes there are improvements to be made, start to request/suggest some of these changes. While there's a cost in implementing any of these solutions, the return on your investment will be substantial.

KLR Consulting Team

## Need more information?

Please call (604)294-2292 or email [info@KLR.com](mailto:info@KLR.com)