Task management essay sample

Task 1. Project aims and objectives.

Thestrategic goalof the project is the establishment of the efficient integrated information system for the company.

In order to achieve the strategic goal, the following objectives are going to be implemented:

- Incorporation of matrix structure;
- Introduction of the modern information system based on the latest achievements in the computers field;
- Facilitation of administration functions management;
- Introduction of new accounting software;
- Automation of accounts reports creation for customers;
- Easy creation of management reports for partners;
- Provision of sufficient support and control for the system;
- Introduction of democratic leadership style;
- Maintenance of communications between all the levels of employees engaged in the project.

Due to the large number of objectives set for the project, there are certain complications and constraints which can arise during its implementation. The major constraints include:

1. Complete absence of the modern information system in the company at present;
2. Limited budget assigned for the creation of the integrated information system;

3. Limited period of time for the development of the project and its implementation;

4. Limited knowledge of employees about modern accounting software and new information technologies.

The establishment of the efficient information system for the company as the strategic goal is a complicated task because the level of efficiency can be estimated only through the needs of the particular company. In the companies which did not have any integrated information system in the past, it is difficult to determine what the main features of the information system are the most efficient for it.

For example, the accounting practice currently has a very low-developed information system which does not answer the requirements of the modern world. All of the employees in the practice have stand alone PCs with standard packages (word processing, spreadsheets and accounting software). This type of system can work for a short while for a company which does not plan on expansion. It can be efficient only for a short while because as soon as the company gets new customers, employees will be unable to monitor most of the activities. Besides, this system does not provide easy communication between employees. It also creates barriers for partners' supervision of all the activities which are happening in the company.

The existing system needs to undergo many changes for it to become efficient. However, it is difficult for the IT project manager to determine all of the characteristics of the new system which will be beneficial for the

company. Only after the system is implemented and works for a short time, it will be possible to make a conclusion about its efficiency. Until that time, it will be impossible to determine whether the task of creation of the efficient information system has been achieved.

An important problem which can put obstacles for the project implementation is the limited budget. The requirements of the modern era are very strict, and in order to be successful, the companies need to spend maximum resources on information systems. If the systems which they are using are not up to date or do not provide all of the modern functions, the company can lose many customers. For example, it can take more time to create accounts reports in this company than in other companies, and customers will prefer to get service at the competitors.

Therefore, the budget for the project needs to be larger. Even though $60, 000 is a comparatively large sum, on average, companies need to spend twice as much in order to establish modern information systems. It is possible to do some of the developments with the $60, 000 but they cannot include all of the modern features which require more financial resources. Most likely, the company will need to make some more contributions in the development of its information systems in the future to make them more efficient. As the first step, the budget is sufficient to make radical changes in the information systems and hire some new personnel to provide maintenance of the equipment. However, the company will need to be prepared for the next step in reformation of its information systems in the

future. For it to be competitive in the modern market, it is necessary to maintain information systems on the highest level.

One more problem which can decrease the quality of the information systems introduced in the company is lack of time. According to the project, only eight weeks are given to the employees engaged in the project to achieve the strategic goal. This time would be sufficient for those companies which already have integrated information systems and only need them to be updated in some aspects. Such developments take less time. However, in the case of this accounting practice, the information system is currently organized on the most basic level. It only gives an opportunity to employees to do the most basic work on the computer, but it does not have any advanced functions. The quality of the information technologies which will be installed in the company may be not as high as it could otherwise be, given more time.

Generally, the work of the IT project manager in this case starts from the very beginning because there is only a base for the information system. The fact that a very short period of time is given to the project manager makes the goal implementation very complicated. In most cases, urgency needs to be supported by additional budget, but in the case of the company both the time and the financial resources are very limited. In order to achieve the goal with the available limited resources, it is necessary for the IT project manager to make a very detailed plan of all the activities, make sure all of the resources in the budget are spent on the most important items.

There can also be a problem resulting from the employees' limited knowledge of the introduced information systems. Even though most of them are good users of PC, they will find it difficult in the very beginning to adjust to the new requirements of the information systems. For example, there are ten accounts working in the company who are very knowledgeable in terms of accounting but have problems with the use of information systems in the company even at present. They will have a very hard time adjusting to the change in the equipment. In order to help those employees to adapt to the new integrated system, it will be necessary to organize training courses with specialists.

Besides, as a part of the project, new accounting software will be introduced because the old versions of software which employees in the company are using, is not efficient anymore. Nobody of the employees is acquainted with the new software; therefore some kind of training will be necessary for all of the employees. Partners will also need to get acquainted with new technologies introduced for creation of different reports and plans.

Task 2. Task management.

In order to achieve the best implementation of the chosen strategy, the following tasks have to be achieved as the result of the task plan (diagram 1):

1. Technical tasks. They include two steps: preparation of current technical facilities of the company for further development; making a

plan of the necessary accounting software to be installed on computers in the company.

2. Procedural tasks. They include the following major steps: adoption of policies and procedures regarding IT organization; delegation of tasks and responsibilities to employees in the project development; making a general plan of actions for company's employers and software engineers.

3. Imposed tasks. They include the following steps: allocation of financial resources in the IT budget; employment of software engineers to develop the project; completion of training courses for employees.

In the task plan, it has been identified how long it will take for each step to be achieved. The period marked in the graph is in days for the convenience of users of the plan. For example, such a task as the preparation of current technical facilities of the company for further development is very challenging, and therefore takes plenty of time (15 days). It includes a detailed analysis of the information systems in the company and identification of their weak sides. The Project Manager needs to devote very much time to investigations of the current system in the company and search of the instruments of its development. Very much time (30 days) is devoted to making a plan of the necessary accounting software to be installed on computers in the company. The plan needs to be very detailed and cover all the aspects of the software and hardware which is going to be installed in the company.

Diagram 1. Task plan for the project

According to the suggested plan, procedural tasks are also very important. Without the adoption of different policies which are necessary for the plan implementation. This task can be completed in 10 days. Delegation of some tasks to the employees is also very important because they need to have a very large participation in the project. Even though they are not software engineers and do not have to deal with technical issues, they also need to get involved into the project to provide organization and express their ideas about the developments. This task takes 5 days. However, the actions of employees and software engineers have to be connected in one general plan for them not to be controversial for one another. The creation of the plan will take about 13 days.

The imposed tasks take the most time because they require many investigations. For example, the company needs to adopt the budget and make sure there is enough money for all of the expenses which the project will generate. Allocation of resources in the budget can take about 8 days. Employment of software engineers is particularly important for the development of the project. The Project Manager needs to employ a team of highly-qualified software engineers in order to have a successful development of the project. All of the procedures connected with this task can take about 17 days because it is not easy to hire a team of skilful engineers. Instalment of software is the longest and the most challenging task, therefore the most attention has to be paid to it. It can take over a month to complete this task. It is crucial in the achievement of the goal which the Project Manager has set for the project. However, no complications with this task are going to arise in case when all the previous tasks were

completed at the excellent level. Particularly important for the completion of this task are the tasks of software engineers employment and the correct allocation of resources in the budget.

The plan is going to take 56 days because the longest set of tasks which have to be implemented for the project takes 56 days. By making calculations of the period of time in which the last tasks are going to be achieved, we determine that there are four such tasks in the project: creation of the plan for software to be installed (takes 45 days); making a general plan of actions for employees and software engineers (takes 28 days); instalment of new software and establishment of integrated system (takes 56 days); completion of training courses for employees (takes 37 days). According to the calculations, instalment of new software and establishment of integrated system takes the most time, therefore it is going to determine the general length of the project development. It is going to take 56 days. Judging from the fact that according to the management plan, the project needs to be implemented within 8 weeks, the deadline is going to be met according to the suggested plan.

The described project plan is very efficient and offers the following advantages for the company:

1. Stimulates efficient communication:

- shows project goals;
- determines the terms for project functioning;
- offers a beginning point for more specified task research;
- gives a documentation of the project plan;

- provides an important visual communication tool.

2. Develops the system of mentoring and control:

- gives the estimation for the project performance;

- assists in defining what actions have to be used;

- provides a complete statement of the outcome;

- motivates tem members to interact.

3. Motivates successful team interactions.

- gives a instrument for a fast foreword to the project;

- determines interfaces for the project;

- makes the use of applications simple.

Task 3. Leadership.

There are points of view that " leadership as a higher order or capability than management: leader is an individual within an organization who is able to influence the attitudes and opinions of others within the organization; a manager is merely able to influence their actions and decisions" (Byars, 1987, p. 159). According to Peter Drucker, " managers are people who do things right (efficiency); leaders are people who do the right things (effectiveness)." (Bjerke, 1999, p. 57). Therefore, leaders do not take power as the primary goal; they put the outcome of their teams as their major objective.

There can be the following technical problems for the project:

- Limited budget for the purchase and instalment of some equipment;

- Limited time for the restructure of information systems;

- Limited skills of IT employees involved in the project.

There are also some non-technical problems connected with the project:

- Resistance of employees to changes in information technologies and structure of the organization;
- Limited knowledge of employees in the new software;
- Temporary decrease in the performance of the organization due to changes in technologies;
- Low motivation of employees to use new equipment and technologies.

The IT project manager needs to solve most of the mentioned problems in the very beginning of the project. Otherwise, performance of the company will decrease in the long run instead of increasing. The project manager might expect the following kinds of resistance to the changes in the company:

1. Some members of the team may be not ready for changes and it will be hard for them to obtain sufficient knowledge to perform at the same high level and complete their new responsibilities;
2. Due to the new skills obtained by managers there will appear a danger of their moving to work for competitors;
3. Members of the teams might not want to grant decision-making to senior management and want to make all kinds of decisions themselves;
4. Members of teams might not agree with the new IT system of the organization due to the changes in their responsibilities;

5. Members of teams might consider that the new IT system is going to decrease the productivity of the organization.

In order to face the mentioned types of resistance, it is very important for the leader to implement the following types of strategy: restructure the old department structure and build a new team-based structure; reinforce team-based structure and benefit from its advantages; decentralize responsibilities; introduce performance management plans. It is also important to take advantage of the strategies of improving organizational effectiveness of the company; improving well-being of employees; providing efficient tools of motivation for employees.

In order to provide the solution to the mentioned problems, it is necessary for the IT project manager to pay attention to the following issues:

- Motivation of the team;
- Analysis of centres of power in the organization;
- Choice of the most efficient leadership style.

The most important issue in managing the team is choosing the right form of motivation for them. Since all people are different, all the employees in the team need different forms of motivation. For some employees, only money works, and they do not get motivated by any other benefits. For others, there is nothing more important than social recognition of their efforts. Other employees will care about the possibilities of future promotion in case of their successful performance. Therefore, in order to manage the team effectively, the first task to do is to define where the needs of employees fall in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

It is easy to discover which employees are very ambitious. They have a very high need of esteem. They need to be praised for the work they do, get recognition from senior-level management, be aware about the possibilities of their future promotion, and fulfil tasks which require lots of responsibility, for example, they can be assigned to prepare reports for the most important clients of the company. These employees are very experienced in the accounting field, they have already made large contributions into the company's success, and therefore they can be motivated only through getting more and more complicated tasks to fulfil. Other members of the team are not as success-oriented, and not as experienced. Therefore, they can be motivated by money awards and praise for the work because their needs fall into the category of belonginess and love.

The last step of managing the project is choosing the leadership style. In order to manage the team effectively, the leader can apply the following styles when managing the team: supporting, directive, coercive, " transformational leadership" styles. Each of them has special recommendations for usage in different situations. For example, supporting and " transformation leadership" styles are very efficient in situations when a new leader comes into the organization, and seeks to establish warm relations with all the members of the team. Directive and coercive styles can work only in the teams which welcome this style and are ready to fulfil all the management's assignments. However, nowadays such employees are quite rare, therefore, in this organization, it is necessary to combine the styles. The Project Manager should be supportive in many situations but also directive in certain issues.

Different employees take changes in different ways. For every employee, the change in the organizational structure and major focus of the company creates new responsibilities which he might not approve of. The manager needs to analyze all the possible kinds of resistance ahead of time and offer solutions. The actions have to be taken in the shortest time.

The leadership style can influence the effectiveness of the management change process to a great extent. The correct choice of the leadership style in this case plays the crucial role. " The cognitive choice approach is based on the assumption that leaders purposefully choose a style of leadership that will maximize individual and group performance. It is the most *rational* of the approaches. It is argued that individuals assess situations (task, subordinates, environment) and decide which leadership would be the most effective in achieving group objectives." (Scholl, 2002, p. 1)

There can be many employees opposing to the changes in the organization, and the leader needs to be very careful when making decisions in order to gain the support of the employees. Lewin's model cannot be applied in the constantly changing environment nowadays because the companies are not static and there is no way for the leader to unfreeze them, make changes and freeze them again. This approach cannot work. The directive and coercive leadership styles which would be applied in such a case would not work because the organization is a living organism which is constantly going through change. " The recent study by Psychological Associates, a St. Louis-based consulting firm, suggests that a major factor governing executive success is leadership style. A majority of the successful executives in the

study exhibit similar behaviours characteristic of a collaborative style of leadership. In fact, the study indicates that collaborative leaders are twice as likely to be successful as those practicing any other style of leadership." (Beatty, Buzzotta, 2002, p. 6)

The development of the project in the organization has to be done step by step, and the leader needs to be supportive and collaborative and care about the motivation of employees the most. If the leader does not understand the needs of employees and makes a mistake new organization structure vice, it may result in many losses for the companies. The leader has to adapt the company to the changes and make sure every employee in the team responds to them.

Task 4. Communication.

One of the most important issues which have to be achieved for the successful development of the project is effective communication between the Project Manager and other employees engaged in the project. " If there is a useful axiom in the business and political mainstream today, it is that nothing can be accomplished without effective communication. No products can be bought or sold, no services dispensed, no candidates elected. Communication is the lifeblood of this society, serving to keep alive our system of commerce and government. A failure to communicate successfully can be devastating to an organization" (Crano, Selnow, 1987, p. 3). Poor communication skills and communication methods applied by the Project Manager can result in the following problems in the company:

- Resistance of employees to the new integrated information system;

- Problems of employees with the use of new technologies;

- Inability of employees to interact at the same efficient level after the introduction of the new system.

In order not to face the mentioned problems, the Project manager needs to apply effective communication skills. First of all, he needs to establish warm relations with all of the employees in the company and make sure he gets positive response from them on all of the actions which he takes. The response of employees is very important in the development of the project because their convenience is the primary goal of the project. If employees are not satisfied with the development and outcome of the project, there would be no sense to have even started it.

In this organization, the role of power and politics is very important. It influences the company greatly. It is very important for the Project Manager to determine the major interactions which are happening in the organization and which can influence the development of the project. For example, the most efficient way of doing that is determination of centres of power in the organization and influencing some employees through others, whose opinion they respect. It is necessary to define relationships between employees, and making a sociogram which identifies the types of interactions within the social network. Without the knowledge of interactions between the employees, there is no way to manage the team effectively.

In this accounting practice, it can be easily identified that one of the four administrators is the most important centre of power. All of the activities in

the company are implemented with his participation. He has warm relations with other administrators, all partners and all of the accountants because he is engaged in interactions with them all on the regular basis. As long as this administrator is interested in the ideas of the project manager and supports them, it is clear that all other employees will be supporting them. Influencing other employees through the administrator is a very wise step for the Project Manager. Besides, it is necessary to make sure that some responsibilities connected with the development of the project are delegated to the administrator. Even though he is not very knowledgeable in the information systems, he has sufficient knowledge in management and his skills are going to be very helpful in organizing this system in the company.

Some situations may happen in which employees will not agree with the decisions of the Project Manager and object to the developments which he offers. In order to explain the advantages of the development to the employees, the Project Manager needs to be particularly argumentative. As far as Eckhouse mentions, " modern business is typically an argumentative practice, in the best sense of the word, when people attempt to persuade by giving and assessing reasons. It is an openly competitive activity, in which working professionals debate issues, defend positions, and evaluate the arguments of others." (Eckhouse, 1999, p. 11).

The Project Manager also needs to listen carefully to the advice which is given by employees. They may be not knowledgeable in equipment instalment in the company, but they are able to give useful information regarding the problems which they have now and their suggestions for the

development. Listening to those comments is particularly important for the Project Manager. According to Goby and Lewis, " we tend to regard listening as a passive, automatic process that just happens rather than as a skill that is essential for good communication. Yet in reality effective listening is a skill that needs to be developed as a prerequisite for successful practice of the more ' active' skills of speaking and writing." (Goby and Lewis, 2000, p. 1).

Task 5. Mentoring and Coaching.

The Project Manager needs to be ready for the role of a mentor and a coach for the company for a short period of time. The reason of that is that the information systems field is very complicated. Accountants are very knowledgeable in the field of accounting but it is difficult for them to learn how to operate new accounting software. In the beginning, they will have great problems with new applications; therefore it is necessary to make sure the Project Manager assists them in that greatly. Many questions might arise in the work process, so the Project Manager needs to consult the accountants at least in the first couple of weeks. Complications may arise not only for the accountants but for administrators as well because they need to provide the general management of the company and they will turn out not familiar with the new software. Project Manager's help will be very useful for them as well. The company's partners will also need some assistance from the Project Manager because a new system of reports will be introduced as the result of the project, and they will need to obtain some new skills in order to be able to work efficiently.

For the company's team to be prepared for the new technologies at the highest level, it is very useful to organize training in the very beginning of the project. The sample programs can be installed on one of the computers, and the Project Manager will be able to tell the employees all of the information about how the programs operate. Some of the programs which will be installed as the result of the project require very advanced skills and knowledge. Therefore, relevant literature to study that software can be bought for all the employees.

In addition to studying the literature, they can listen to some training courses organized by the Project Manager. That is why all of the employees will be well-prepared for the application of the new programs and information systems by the time the project is implemented. Due to this step, the company's performance will increase radically when the new system will be finally implemented. All of the employees will have good skills of operating the new equipment; therefore, they will be able to complete all of their tasks at the highest speed and with maximum quality.

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