# Pinto: project management and team members flashcard

Engineering, Project Management

1. This chapter discussed the characteristics of high performing project teams. List the factors that characterize these teams and give examples of each one. High performing teams need to have a clear sense of mission, an understanding of the team's interdependence and be results oriented. They also need to create cohesiveness, trust and enthusiasm. A clear sense of mission means that all team members understand and accept the purpose of the project. A strong understanding enables team members to be more effective individually (i. e. without the PM) in solving problems.

For example, a team member who understands the goals of the project is in a position to provide input about what do regarding conflicting resources use, where as a team member who lacks understanding will not be able provide constructive advice. The team's interdependence represents the capabilities of individual members and their interrelatedness in relation to accomplishing project goals. It also requires members to set aside preconceived notions about other functional departments and to appreciate the strengths of others. Here, a team member who understands the contributions of others is more likely to ask others for advice in brainstorming or when confronted with a problem.

Those who do not have a sense of interdependence may attempt to solve the problem alone or be forced to hassle the PM with every problem outside their field of expertise. Being results oriented requires rallying all members around the same project goals and motivating them towards completion of those goals. This goes hand-in-hand with enthusiasm, which simply means getting people excited about the project and raising the energy level around

project activities. Teams that possess these two attributes are more driven toward project goals and may work at a faster or more intense pace.

Cohesiveness is the desire and attraction that team members have for working with one another. Sometimes rewards are used to develop cohesiveness and to generate the desire for members to devote time to the project. Cohesiveness helps create harmony among team members and develop smoother working conditions than teams that do not demonstrate a cohesive front. Finally, trust is evident when team members feel comfortable working together. They have confidence in one another's abilities. When trust is developed, members are willing to express differences and handle disagreements upfront.

2. " Trust can actually encourage disagreement and conflict among team members." Explain why this could be the case. This is true because trust enables members to express their differences in opinions, understandings and ideas. They do so in an open environment that accepts differences and allows team members to work out their differences in a civil manner. By doing so, trust allows teams to bring up issues as they arise rather than allow them to build into insurmountable obstacles.

3. Identify the stage of group development. Why is it necessary for project teams to move through these stages prior to becoming productive? Forming is a sort of orientation stage where members are feeling out each other, their roles in the group. They also begin creating the forms of communication and types of behavior that will exist within the group. Storming is filled with

conflict stemming from boundary testing. Given the rules established in the forming stage, team members will begin to push the limits of the team's structure and newly established practices. This is the period during which conflicts should arise and be addressed; otherwise they may rise to the surface later at more inopportune times.

Norming occurs after conflicts have been hashed out in the storming stage. At this point team members have tested the waters (and each other) and have come to a set of agreed upon group standards. Rules of conduct and expectations are established. Trust and cohesiveness also begin to form at this stage as members gain confidence in one another.

Performing is where the work actually takes place. The group has been formed and rules are established so the focus is on visible project progress. Trust and confidence exist at high levels and group performance is optimized.

Adjourning happens when the project is over. Group members may be separated into their previous or new roles. There are many issues (discussed in other chapters) that relate to this process. In order to aid in the process, team members and the project manager need to be aware of adjourning stage and treat it as a serious transition period.

Teams need to complete all stages to become productive because the group development process removes many of the barriers to working as a team. With interpersonal issues out of the way and trust and confidence developed,

the team can focus on the accomplishing the goals at hand, rather than on the workings of the group.

4. Gersick's model of punctuated equilibrium offers an alternative view of group development. Why does she suggest that some defining moment (such as an explosion of emotion) often occurs at some midpoint in the project? What does this defining event accomplish for the team? Dissatisfaction and frustration stemming from a lack of progress or unclear operating procedures triggers a mid-life project transition. The event causes a major disruption in group dynamic and standards. As a result, the group revises its norms in a way that facilitates better overall group performance.

5. Explain the concepts of " task" and " psycho-social" outcomes for a project. Why are psycho-social outcomes so important for project team members? Task outcomes refer to the successful completion of project goals. Psycho-social outcomes relate to the team members evaluation of the entire project experience. These outcomes are important because members will carry past memories into new projects. This will affect members' attitudes regarding subsequent projects.

6. Distinguish between the Traditional, Behavioral, and Interactionist views of team conflict. How might each explain and treat a project team conflict episode?

The traditional view sees conflict as negative. Those who prescribe to this line of thinking try to avoid conflict. When it does arrive, they believe in resolving it as swiftly as possible. The behavioral view is that conflict is

natural. Under this thinking, conflict is not avoided, but managed. Instead of suppressing, conflict it is allowed to exist in a controlled atmosphere. Interactionists encourage conflict. They believe there is an optimal level of conflict that drives innovation and productivity. Therefore, conflict is allowed to exist unchecked until it surpasses the optimal level.

7. Identify the five major methods for resolving conflict. Give an example of how each might be applied in a hypothetical project team conflict episode. The five ways to resolve conflict are mediate, arbitrate, control, accept and eliminate. A project manager who wishes to mediate the conflict will use either defusion or confrontation. Defusion is used to reach a mutual agreement on the subject without delving into the roots of the conflict. Confrontation attempts to get at the underlying causes of the conflict. This takes more time, but gives each party a chance to state their side of the argument.

At the end of which, a common ground on the issue is negotiated. Arbitrating is different in that the project manager renders a decision rather than coming to a mutual decision with those involved. The project manager instead listens to both sides and then hands down a decision. For conflicts that cannot be quickly resolved, managers may choose to control the disagreement. To do so, the parties involve may be separated for a short period or their interaction may be restricted for the duration of the project. When nothing can be done to resolve or control the conflict, the team may just have to accept the fact that the conflict is going to exist and do their best to work around it. The last option is to eliminate the problem. This may

be the most extreme action as it may require transferring members of the team to other projects or back to their original departments.

8. What are some of the guidelines for adopting a strategy of " Principled Negotiation?" One guideline is to " separate the people from the problem." People are emotionally attached to their viewpoints and opinions. In order to reduce the amount of influence of personality, ego and the like, it is important to limit the personal issues of the problem and concentrate on the actual issue creating the differences. Putting aside preconceived notions, being open and understanding, and being empathetic are good steps to successful negotiation. A second guideline is " focus on interests, not positions." This gets to the heart of the differences. There may be one or two major motivating factors that are fueling the larger conflict.

Getting at these fundamental interests allows the negotiators to formulate a solution for each interest that will satisfy the multiple positions rooted in it. The next guideline is " invent options for mutual gain." It may difficult at first to recognize potential win-win resolutions to a conflict. However, using certain techniques increases the likelihood of arriving at a mutually beneficial solution. Techniques include positive and inclusive brainstorming, which attempts to identify multiple potential outcomes. These outcomes are then broadened through additional discussion. Another technique is to identify shared interests and generate solutions based on areas of common ground. This begins a process of collaboration, which may lead to an agreeable solution.

9. Explain the idea that we should " focus on interests, not positions." Can you think of an example in which we successfully negotiated with someone else using this principle? Focus on interests, not positions means getting to the underlying fears or desires that are at the root cause of conflicting positions. Positions are more on the surface. Interests are the driving force behind them. The rest of this question asks students to apply it in a personal example from their own experience. The key is to ensure that they understand the difference between interests and positions in describing the example that serves as their answer.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 6. 1: Columbus Instruments

This case is based on a true story of a once-successful organization that had allowed its project management practices to degenerate to the point where assignment to a project team was often a mark of disfavor and a sign of pending termination. The case involves issues of motivation, structural effects on projects, and project team staffing. It offers students an opportunity to see how, if left unchecked, certain behaviors by department heads and others in the organization can work counter to the desires to use project teams to improve organizational profitability and instead make them a dumping ground for malcontents and poor performers.

Questions:

1) What are the implications of CIC's approach to staffing project teams? Are they using them as training grounds for talented fast-trackers or dumping grounds for poor performers?

The response to this question is pretty self-evident to students. Clearly, the company has adopted a dumping ground attitude because there is no down-side risk to managers who want to off-load poor performers onto project teams.

2) How would you advise the CEO to correct the problem? Where would you start?

One huge problem is the lack of responsibility that pervades the organization. Managers see that project teams are a convenient method for discarding marginal employees for extended periods of time. Because there are no consequences to this behavior, it has become increasingly common and is widely used. The first step is to create some accountability whereby functional managers must respond appropriately to resource requests and assign good personnel to these teams. At the same time, these managers must receive credit for doing so. Where fear of failure or lack of authenticity operate, project team staffing will never be taken seriously and this problem will not be resolved. Another solution would be to begin leveling the playing field by giving the project manager authority to select her own team rather than depend upon the kindness of the functional manager to staff the team for her.

3) Discuss how issues of organizational structure and power play a role in the manner in which project management has declined in effectiveness at CIC.

As noted, authority must be more evenly spread here. This organization operates with a strict functional structure in which the project manager has no power. All staffing assignments are made by the functional manager and there is no negative consequence attached to poor staffing. When the philosophy of " anyone will do, and the worse person, the better!" is in place, it is not hard to see how the projects are fairing poorly.

Case Study 6. 2: The Bean-Counter and the Cowboy

A common theme with multi-functional project teams is a lack of appreciation for the duties of people from other departments. The concept of organizational " differentiation" is key to understanding this malady. It is common for functional " siloing" to create an attitude in which the contributions of other project team members are either not recognized or undervalued. In this case, there are some clear signs of antagonism between Neil, the finance person and Susan, from Marketing. The terms " bean-counter" and " cowboy," have been, in fact, coined by these people to refer to members of the other functions.

Questions:

1) Was the argument today between Neil and Susan the true conflict or a symptom? What evidence do you have to suggest it is merely a symptom of a larger problem?

The interaction is evidence of more deep-rooted antagonisms between Neil and Susan and reflects a fundamental lack of appreciation for what each person brings to the project. Not only does each person view their own contributions as important, they minimize the value added by the other. Neil clearly resents the activities (including trips) that are part of Susan's job and feels that she is not committed to the project due to frequent absences. Susan is defensive about this, citing the fact that her job does require extended periods where she is likely to miss meetings.

2) Develop a conflict management procedure for your meeting in 30 minutes. Create a simple script to help you anticipate the comments you are likely to hear from both parties.

Students can be asked to role-play the part of either Neil or Susan as they respond to this question. The instructor should assign one person (or group) to serve as the project manager and two others to adopt the conflicting personalities. Because the issue has flared up, it is likely that tempers will still be high when they meet with the project manager; thus, a script should anticipate more give-and-take between the two individuals and consider at what points it makes sense to intervene, how far to allow them to express their opinions, and exactly what should be said to them to get something positive out of the conflict. As it has come to an open confrontation, a script for conflict resolution has to recognize that there are egos involved.

3) Which conflict resolution style is warranted in this case? Why? How might some of the other resolution approaches be inadequate in this situation?

This question requires students to think in terms of others and their likely responses to various behaviors. Should the project manager develop an approach that leads to confrontation? If so, what will be the outcome? First, confrontation techniques take time; therefore, a meeting with these two people should be given sufficient time for the issues to come out and then for resolution to occur. Should the project manager arbitrate the conflict? Ignore it? Each of these options must be explored and the downside addressed. Usually, by the time an open confrontation has occurred, the more benign approaches such as ignoring or accepting it may no longer be viable options.

Case Study 6. 3: Johnson-Rogers Software Engineering, Inc.

This case shows one example of the types of problem that can be encountered with the use of new technologies, such as the internet, to help link participants on a distributed project team. In this case, a combination of geographically-dispersed project team members, faulty technologies, and other concerns are hampering progress on the project. Further, an additional phenomenon is the fact that distributed project teams do not allow for standard team development stages to occur because team members can only interact in formal channels. Without informal communication, it becomes more difficult to build trust and enthusiasm among members of the project team. Kate's difficulties here are by no means abnormal, but a managerial plan for handling these communications will go a long way toward helping her and the team get through the awkward " newness" of geographically-dispersed project teams.

Questions:

1. How would you advise Kate to proceed? Analyze the conversation she had this morning. What went right? What went wrong?

Students should consider that Kate does recognize there is a problem here and she is willing to make the tough decision to work to find a way that they can continue to communicate in a live setting. The easiest option would have been to agree with the team members and move to either one-on-one conversations or simple e-mails. Kate is to be congratulated on sticking to her guns. On the other hand, she is still new at this technology and has been unaware of time differences among the team. In trying to please everybody on the team, she may end up not pleasing anybody, so at some point she will need to make some tough choices. Like it or not, some team members will need to meet at difficult times. On the other hand, if she does up-front planning prior to these meetings and ensures that everyone is prepared, it may be possible to limit the amount of time spent on the meeting itself. The key is advance preparation by Kate and everyone else on the team.

2. What should Kate's next steps be?

Kate needs to decide whether she is committed to real-time link-ups with the team. If she really values this time, she must get the maximum benefit out of it by making sure these meetings are productive and that everyone is prepared in advance. Further, perhaps she could organize some sub-group meetings among sets of the participants and save the full-blown team

meetings for occasional use. Students should be asked to think creatively to come up with some action options for Kate to adopt.

3. How can she use the technology of the internet and teleconferencing to enhance team development and performance?

Teleconferencing can start to create a team out of a group of faceless individuals but it must be used appropriately. The chapter cites several principles that can be used to enhance the teleconferencing experience and instructors should ensure that students address each of them as a means to help Kate resolve some of her problems.