Julie L. Kling

Project Management

P. Coverstone

U.W. Stout

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Part A:

“Do I have what it takes to be a successful project manager?” That is the question with which I began my self-reflection when asked to consider skills and abilities during module 1 at the beginning of this course. My response at the time was a resounding “yes.” My response now at the end of the course would be “yes” and ‘no.”

I now have a clearer definition of what a project manager is and what skills are needed. Bigelow states that the most common traits or first traits thought of are “extraordinary energy levels, phenomenal political skills, and an absolute obsession with results.” (Bigelow, 2000, p. 1) I would still affirm those traits but also stress the importance of attention to detail, communication skills, and the ability to organize, build, maintain and supervise a team. While I stressed communication skills in my initial reflection, I would now underline it several times and perhaps replace Bigelow’s political skills with communication skills. In most of my postings on the discussion board, I found myself coming back to communication as a root cause of other problems or issues. If one cannot communicate effectively, clearly, and efficiently, the political skills and charismatic personality are not going to serve one as well. As I learned throughout the team/group efforts, communication or the lack of was at the root of most of the problems we encountered. (See reflections in Part B.)

I have also expanded my understanding of what types of team player skills a project manager needs to have. A project manager not only needs to be able to be a part of a team, but must be a good organizer of tasks and people as well as have the necessary supervisory skills and diplomatic skills to keep the team at performing at exceptional levels for the duration of the project. While the world of templates, AONs, and critical paths are new to me, I do have the communication skills and ability to multi-task that are necessary for project management. I would also affirm from my initial reflections that successful project managers have the ability to multi-task and have an ability to know what skills are required for a specific project. I would add that they also need to know when to use specific skills. The ability to problem-solve and size up the situation is key, so that one has a sense of what skills to use and is also willing to seek out others with the needed skills. I would also add that project managers cannot be “lone-rangers” and must not be afraid to say they do not have the necessary skills and are willing to turn to others, either other team members or outside consultants, to ensure the success of the project. Successful managers can find that perfect balance between people and task and know what to do when. Therefore, at the top of my list for skills for a project manager, in addition to team building, management and supervision skills, and communication skills, are the ability to have a realistic, authentic knowledge of self, the task, and the situation and an ability to adapt to the environment and find the proper balance between people and task that the project demands.

As far as my future participation in groups, I have a more realistic understanding of what is expected and also have acquired many, many resources from the course materials, the instructor, and my class colleagues that will serve me well as I serve on team projects.

Part B: 360 Reflections

Selecting the project scenario was our first challenge as a group. The group was slow to organize itself and select a case during the first week. One group member asserted herself and took control and people slowly posted their choices. However, the group evidently did not act fast enough and the self-appointed project manager stated she would no longer serve in that capacity. The group opinions that had been expressed so far had indicated case 1. However, the person who was impatient with the slowness of the group and had resigned as project manager, suggested we do case #3, and then finally decided late Friday time was running out, and consulting only one group member, assumed the group would work with a case from her own personal consulting practice and posted a completed document stating this was the case the group should work with and posted it supposedly for the group’s review. However, the case was also submitted at the drop box as the group’s final submission. This is the point where group frustration reached a high level. I was frustrated because four emails indicating that the group should do case #1 were ignored. The instructor’s diplomatic involvement settled what case we would work with.

This experience shaped how we interacted with each other for the duration of the project. Other members then took an active role as we decided to share the project manager responsibilities for the rest of the project. However, that first week did place a cloud over the group as the same member who assumed and then gave up project management that first week also sent out e-mails that were not very positive in tone and accused group members of not being adults. All group members did step up to the plate and tried to focus on the tasks at hand to move on to the needs assessment.

The group was able to focus on the task of needs assessment and was able to surface who the stakeholders were and also split up the responsibilities for the needs assessment. The questions that were created for each group of stakeholders were relevant. The challenge was how to put the data together since we were not actually completing a project. This was a challenge throughout as we found ourselves creating or faking data. All participated as the Project Charter was developed, and I believe we developed a strong Project Charter. We were able to successfully complete the other required components; however, one group member had extensive family and work commitments that limited her participation to later in the week. This often resulted in her being left out from parts of the project loop.

Since the group was slow to start that first week, the tendency then became for others to jump in sometimes too soon if someone did not respond quickly. While we met deadlines, not everyone was given an equal chance to participate because the eager beavers would jump in and complete someone’s task even before it was due. I admit I am guilty of the “eager beavering” too, but I also experienced someone working on my task without giving me a chance to submit what I had completed. Deadlines were established, but the group’s unspoken norm was that the task needed to be completed a day or so before the deadline. The project would have been smoother if there would have been more deliberate and clearer communication during the planning phase. During the execution and closure phase, most of the areas we needed to go back and correct were ones where laps in communication or “eager beavering” or “jumping the gun” occurred. Our group did learn to rely on one another’s skills by the end of the project and communication did improve. Our strength was the different experiences the group brought to the project and everyone’s willingness to participate.

The communication process I would adhere to as a result of this experience would be to make more use of the WBS and have weekly communication meetings to ensure all were on board and were clear of what was expected. Our group did do a thorough job of analyzing our stakeholders and consulting them throughout the process. An awareness of the stakeholders informed the change management process, which is an area I worked with several times throughout the process. Clarifying the stakeholders’ assumptions about change and decided the best way to inform them of changes, increased my knowledge of the need for formality and having clear procedures in all aspects of project management. Also discovering how changes would be executed made me aware of how a change impacted all areas of the project from budget to timelines to the number and amount of staff needed to complete the project.

One of my strongest learnings from the course is how each piece of the project management puzzle fits together. Therefore, the quality plan is necessary to ensure that each piece of the puzzle comes together for the success of the project in line with its initial scope. I have learned that in a project nothing takes place in isolation. What may seem like the smallest change has a ripple effect. Therefore, the quality plan will help make sure that what needs to be done is done in a timely fashion and serves as an umbrella to guide the project to completion and help prevent scope creep.

As mentioned in Part A of my reflection, the world of templates, AONs, and Gantt charts are new to me. I am a writer, so I am used to putting my thoughts and plans into narrative form. However, I see the relevance and efficiency of charts, forms, etc. It is much easier to look at a chart and see who does what when than read through an entire narrative or text based document. These charts, forms, and templates facilitate the communication process. As stated in Part A, communication is important for the project management process. As far as lessons learned, in addition to having a fuller understanding of what project management involves, I also have begun to use templates, charts, etc. to facilitate communication. I have just finished my first week of the fall semester teaching, I have created two charts that will help students track their progress and assignment due dates and included them with my f2f syllabi. This is a first for me!

Reference

Bigelow, Deborah. (2000). What makes a good project manager. *Expert Series*. PM Solutions: The Project Management Experts. Reprinted from *PM Network* 14.4.