WHO CARES

Excerpt
Chapter 7 - Managing Your
Project Commitments

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Better Systems for Managing People

Who Cares

Excerpt
Chapter 7 – Managing Your Project Commitments

Much of our work today is project work. With the rapid advance of computing and telecommunications technology and the globalization of business we are kept busy with change. We're rightsizing, reorganizing and/or merging. We're launching new products, new distribution channels, new partnerships… new… new! All of these initiatives require people to learn how to handle new requirements, new systems, new relationships new… new… new!! Between the time somebody decides that we are going to do something new and the time we become comfortable and proficient doing it the new way, we've got a project; and we need to manage it.

In previous chapters we have been discussing how to manage relationships with ourselves, our boss, our employees, and our clients. In these cases we were assuming the relationships to be ongoing, albeit alive. In this chapter we will discuss managing project relationships. These relationships are also alive but they are not ongoing. They have to be formed quickly and managed consistently through to project completion, and the key word is "new." When a new manager takes over an old department, he/she is often given a period of time before people expect the department to be operating "up to scratch." We sometimes refer to this period as a "honeymoon," a reasonable time for people to get used to the new reporting relationships. Fair enough but what about a new project? Not only do we have a new manager, we have a new objective and a new team, consisting of people seconded from different departments, with different skills, different cultures, different vested interests, and… no honeymoon! Surely this is a case where the project manager needs a process that will encourage a common understanding of the behavior expected of all the players sharing project commitments.

Project Commitment Management – Definition

There are two aspects to managing projects.

List Making:

One aspect is objective and procedural. Let's call it list making or scheduling. It often takes the form of an arrow diagram and/or a Gantt chart. It addresses the questions: what has to be done, by whom, when and in what order, and how it is to be done. Such a discipline is required to manage the development and implementation procedures inherent in the project.
It manages the relationship between *activities* and deliverables.

Its operating elements are *objective*, dealing with facts: tangible deliverables, numbers, $, time.

Its purpose is to monitor *facts* to know where we are: what has to be done, who, how… etc.

Its activities are doing things to *build something*, like a new system: e.g. analyzing, designing, documenting, coding, testing….

Its tools are things like arrow diagrams, work breakdown structures, activity lists, Gantt charts, schedules, milestones, $, deliverables' formats… etc.

It encourages everyone to have a *common knowledge* of the procedures.

Managing Interest:

The other aspect is subjective and behavioral and addresses the question "who cares?" It has to do with managing peoples' interest in the "lists" you are making. This is the commitment management discipline and consists of regular interactive meetings required to manage the trust relationships between the players in a project caring network and their deliverable commitments.

It manages the relationship between *people* and deliverables.

The operating elements are *subjective*, dealing with perceptions, feelings; negative feelings like apathy, fear, frustration, suspicion, loneliness, and despair; or positive feelings like desire, confidence, empowerment, trust, harmony and hope.

Its purpose is to influence *behavior*, enabling people to care, manage their self-relationship, their motivation and their commitments.

Its activities are dreaming, worrying, being interrupted, seeking help, soliciting and managing commitments – *building confidence.*

Its tools are project managers and each of the players in their respective caring networks, and management processes to make visible (known to all people):
- Individual responsibilities
- Individuals' current commitment status
- Accountability Structures (avenues for seeking help)

It encourages a *common culture* with shared values for the commitment management behavior expected from all the players.

Much has been written about list making but it is the latter discipline (managing interest) we are going to address in this chapter. The context we will use for the discussion will be relating to implementing new information systems because much of our experience has been with this application area. However, early in our experience, we separated the commitment management function from the systems development and implementation function (list making). The resulting CARENET process can be used to manage any kind of project. Clients use it for merging companies, opening new stores, creating and launching new products, moving offices, etc.

People and Their Commitments

In a meeting with a prospective client, a senior executive asked me "Can you teach my people how to keep their commitments?" I can't remember exactly what I answered her, something about people and commitments; but anyway I blew it. The meeting was over in a few minutes and I haven't seen her since. Some time later I was telling one of my clients about the conversation and she said to me "Mike, you're too literal, you should have said 'Yes,'" and I immediately understood the mistake I had made. Her *literal* question had been "Can you teach my people how to keep their commitments?" but her question emotionally had been "Can you help me with my pain?" I remember feeling her pain at the time and also feeling that I understood why she was in pain and how I could help her, but unfortunately I had ignored that in favor of struggling to answer her literal question. I should have said "The short answer to that is 'Yes'. The long answer is that I can help you fix it so that keeping their commitments will no longer be a painful issue, not for you nor for them. It isn't about keeping or not keeping personal commitments, it's about managing or not managing personal commitments." The rest of this chapter is about how to bring about this long answer.

Again we must refer you to Chapters 2 and 3 in order to minimize unnecessary repetition.

Chapter 2 makes the case that we are complex, individual creatures. We are complex because we each consist of a hierarchy of inseparable, interrelated components: our spirit, our body, our intellect, and our language. We are individual because each of us is the only one who can manage the harmony between our component parts. If our internal parts are in discord our *energy of attention* will be consumed internally towards mending this discord, and we will have no energy available to manage external commitments.

Chapter 3 describes the characteristics of a management process that will encourage the players to manage their individual harmony and thereby liberate their personal power for managing external commitments.

Here, we will introduce a process that a project manager can use to encourage team members to manage their personal harmony while managing the trust relationships (commitments) they have with the other members of the Project Caring Network. But first we have to examine the project environment and the cast of characters.