

## **Project management – moving from good to great**

You may have some slick software, some carefully defined project processes, some deft handling of the client, all of which will take you along the road to a great project, but not all the way. Here is a checklist of the things that make the difference; the things that will enable you to excel in project management.

### **Client intimacy**

Seducing your clients is what we have in mind here, not in any improper sense, but with your close attention to their needs at all levels.

Officially, they all want the project completed successfully, on time and within budget. In reality, their individual needs are different. The sponsor may be desperate to impress the Board with the strategic benefits of the project. Another director may be hoping to get promoted if the project succeeds. Some of the users may worry that their jobs will become routine because of it. By addressing individual and group needs in the client, as well as their corporate requirements, you can move them from satisfaction to delight.

### **Inspire your team, don't just lead them**

It is obvious that you select a good team, lay out the project goals and milestones, and assign tasks, but do not leave it there. Your team is going to be a team of excellence; a team which enjoys working together, and has the "extra mile" as its motto. How? Ask them! You will have selected them as much for their enthusiasm as for their technical skill, so now all you have to do is ask them the question. Trust that when you give them your vision of a great team, which you sincerely believe is possible, they will respond to your trust and belief in them, and they will be able to define it, and make it happen.

### **Balance task, team and individuals**

Your team will be inspired to deliver for the client, the company, for each other and for themselves. Everyone will benefit at all levels – that is your aim. A project completed on time by competent staff who operate effectively as a team is your starting point – that is good, but greatness needs more.

### **Sparkling project**

The project will have something special about it when it is done, and that something special will be the "extra mile" defined by your team. It may not be early, it may meet the specification to the letter and no more, but in the client's eyes, and therefore everyone else's, it will be special.

### **Terrific team**

Shared goals, good communication, mutual support – that is where you begin. For your team to be terrific, you will have "oiled the joints" between all the individuals and the team, and between team and clients. If clients are part of your team, you will apply extra oil, such as holding a special team integration session with them, designed by your team.

### **Starring individuals**

Each team member will be competent, of course, but motivated to give their utmost, in expectation of whatever reward best meets their individual needs, as well as the intrinsic reward of doing a great job. You will know, from your discussions with each

individual, whether they want challenging experience, or special recognition, or some new learning. Despite all the confines of a project, together you will find a way to meet their needs, and enable them to go the extra mile. Note that financial rewards are not the ones that matter here. The biggest reward will be the pure satisfaction of delivering outstanding performance.

### **Project culture**

When you work with your team and your clients, both as individuals and in groups, you will be building a great culture, which will have the following elements:

1. **Respect**  
Everyone will be treated with respect, and their contribution valued, no matter how junior they are. This means that there will be no patronising tone, no instructions given without the courtesy of a please and a thank you, no suggestion of superiority in attitude. This will apply from all levels to all levels.
2. **Openness**  
Everyone will be open about what is happening and will say what they think. If mistakes are made, they will be investigated in a spirit of no blame, and treated as a valuable learning exercise.
3. **Trust**  
You will make it clear that you want to trust everyone in the team from the start: trust them to deliver, trust them with information, trust them to tell you if something goes wrong. However, trust needs to be earned and grow. Each individual will demonstrate over time how much they merit trust, and the more they do that, the more disciplined they will show themselves to be, and the more freedom they will have as a result.
4. **Initiative**  
This freedom will breed a sense of initiative and ownership, which are attitudes guaranteed to enhance performance.
5. **Anticipation**  
Thinking ahead is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a great project team. Not just taking action to avert problems, but really thinking beyond that – for example, anticipating a client reaction that they may themselves not have thought of, and showing them a better way, or realigning their thinking.
6. **Innovation**  
Your inspiring leadership style will make the team feel confident to suggest new ideas and ways of doing things. Some may be impractical, but each will be treated as an important resource, whether it is implemented or not, and this will encourage more ideas, and more improvements to the way you operate.

In summary, if we take the “raw materials” of a competent and enthusiastic team as a given, then your leadership will be what makes the difference. In essence, this comes down to the clarity of your goals and vision, and your belief and trust in your team, which will allow them to take the project from good to great.

Anna Hipkiss specialises in advising consultants in all fields on their business effectiveness, including coaching in leadership skills.