Project Management 101. Skills for Leading and Working in Teams, pt. 4

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This month we complete our series by examining the Project Management Institute's knowledge areas of human resource, communications, risk, and procurement management.

Leading Effective Teams

Human resource management involves making the most effective use of resources to meet project objectives. This includes resource planning, project staff acquisition, and team development.

Leadership skills play an important role, as the project manager must create and foster teamwork in an environment where he or she has responsibility for completion of the work but little, if any, authority over the staff performing the work. Project managers can create effective teams by actively managing:

- Expectations: paint a clear and compelling picture of each task's place in the project, its deliverables, benefits, and performance measures
- Accountability: inform project staff of their roles, responsibilities, and how they will be measured
- Management: play a role that is supportive and facilitating rather than directive
- Ownership: keep team members informed and involved
- Team development: create teamwork through team-building exercises and involving team members in leading discussions during team meetings

Creating the Lines of Communication

Often, little if any planning is done to manage communications within a project. However, it is an important step because all project information should be available to the people who need to know it.

The first step is to identify the project stakeholders—the people who are involved in or affected by the project and have a need for information. The project manager must then determine the content and format of the reports. Put yourself in each stakeholder's shoes to help evaluate what information he or she will need and want to know. The third step is determining the frequency and method of communication for each stakeholder. This includes when, where, and how often meetings, reports, and presentations will take place.

The final step is to plan for updating and disseminating the information, which includes version control, storage, and document retrieval. One method that works well, particularly for global projects, is a company intranet site where project documents can be viewed by all team members at any time.

Planning for the Worst

Good project managers manage risk to reduce uncertainty. The old adage "plan now or pay later" applies, as risk is greatest in the beginning of a project when the level of uncertainty is the highest. Risk management early on creates an evaluation and response strategy to reduce the likelihood that a risk will jeopardize project success.

There are two components to risk management: probability and impact. Risks to the project should be evaluated on each component and then prioritized. Because risk management involves cost, the project should have strategies for dealing with the greatest potential risks. Response strategies include:

- Avoidance: eliminating the risk
- Transference: shifting the responsibility for the risk to a third party
- Mitigation: reducing the probability or consequence of the risk
- Contingency: planning to reduce the impact of the risk, should it occur
- Acceptance: taking no action

In our software update sample project, one risk is the loss of a key resource. To avoid this risk, the company could hire and train an additional resource as a backup. To transfer this risk, it could subcontract the work. To mitigate the risk, it could provide incentives or a raise for each key resource. As a contingency strategy it could investigate alternatives such as the cost and availability of subcontractors to complete the project if a key resource is lost.

Managing Procurement

Project managers may not be involved in procurement in every project they manage; however, understanding the organization's procurement process is essential when they do need to secure products or services. The procurement process includes the preparation of the statement or specifications of work to be done, solicitation of vendors, negotiation, contract preparation, and contract administration. Generally, the company's legal department is involved, potentially adding considerable time to the process.

Procurement planning includes a determination of "make or buy" for each element that must be obtained for the project. The project manager should consider subcontracting or outsourcing any tasks for which internal resources are scarce or unavailable. For the software update project, it may be possible to bring in a contract software installation specialist if internal resources are not available.

The Skills for Collaboration

HIM professionals have increasing opportunities to collaborate with colleagues throughout their organizations in a wide variety of IT, clinical, and administrative initiatives. The concepts and skills introduced in this series help HIM professionals contribute their expertise through effective participation on project teams, as team members and project managers.

Interested in Pursuing Education in Project Management?

AHIMA offers a two-part course on the theory and practice of IT project management, which blends online learning and a one-day institute. For information on the course, "e-HIM™ Project Management for Information Technology," visit http://campus.ahima.org.

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