

EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF PROJECT TEAMS

Nadya Kuzmanova

ABSTRACT

The publication focuses on topical issues related to building effective teams in project management. Modern organizations face serious challenges: severe crisis situations, accelerating global competition, rapid scientific and technical progress, relatively fast obsolescence of knowledge and human resources skills, need for resolving complex and non-standard tasks which require the efforts of highly qualified teams, among other issues. Against this background, teams play a key role in the process of accomplishing the ongoing projects because work-place collaboration and knowledge and experience sharing improve the results from the activity of organizations and enhance their competitiveness.

KEY WORDS

Project. Project team. Effective functioning.

JEL CLASSIFICATION

M19, O22.

INTRODUCTION

Effective project teams achieve positive synergy effect. These teams are characterized by a variety of characteristics. Firstly, each team member is aware of the common project goals and is determined to work actively for their achievement. Secondly, the team comprises specialists in all necessary spheres of expertise and the team members are subordinate directly to the project manager. Thirdly, the atmosphere in the team guarantees equality and solidarity which facilitate the process of attaining the project goals etc.

1 EFFECTIVE PROJECT TEAM PERFORMANCE

The process of creating highly effective project teams involves a variety of activities: recruiting project members; setting the major working rules within the team; developing an appropriate strategy for team work and evaluating team members' performance; conducting project team meetings.

The activity of effective project teams is based on the following principles:

- Clear project goals (All members of the project team should be familiar with the project goals and be prepared to take responsibility for their accomplishment.);
- Plan plausibility (The project plan and schedule should be compliant with the abilities of the project members to accomplish the scheduled activities on time);
- Acceptable rules about the organization of the project activities (Clear working procedures in line with the specificity and goals of every project; when the need arises, the procedures and instructions should be adequately updated etc.);
- Project manager leadership (Flexible leadership in compliance with the project attributes and its surrounding environment; coordination of the interrelations between the team and the remaining sub-divisions of the organization; active participation in the recruitment of the project team; generating strong motivation among the team members; constructive problem solving and chairing of meetings; stimulating group decision taking.);
- Willingness for joint work and training substitution skills to guarantee the smooth functioning of the team;
- Timely discussion of issues related to the successful functioning of the team (In connection with conflict situations that might arise), etc.

M. Alexandrova underlines the favorable and unfavorable factors related to the efficiency of the project team performance. (Kuzmanova, Alexandrova, 2013, p. 82). According to the author, the factors that stimulate actively the efficiency of the project team performance include:

- presence of professional interest and work incentive;
- recognition of achievements;
- good interpersonal relations;
- efficient team leadership methods;
- high team members qualification;
- career prospects.

Some of the barriers that lower the work efficiency of the project team, M. Alexandrova points out, include:

- not clearly defined project goals and guidelines for its realisation;
- insufficient resources;
- power struggle and conflicts in the teams;

- top management indifference;
- low level of job safety;
- redefining goals and priorities.

Practice substantiates the claim that project team integration contributes to the efficiency of the team work. Based on the results from conducted research it can be concluded that projects with high efficiency values also have high integration values and vice versa. The fully integrated project team exhibits the following special traits: (Baiden, Price, 2011)

- fully oriented towards the respective project and its goals;
- slight differences between the members of the team;
- team members collaborate to achieve high efficiency by openly exchanging information;
- shared responsibility for failures and successes;
- achieved positive synergy effect.

The integration of the project teams can be evaluated according to the following elements: team and goals focus; continuity of work without borders; unlimited exchange of information; creating a dedicated team; fair interrelations; opportunities and respect for all members of the team; ‘not laying the blame on any team member’ culture. (Baiden, Price, Dainty, 2006)

Some authors pay special attention to high performing teams which develop new products. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that not many teams have all the characteristics. On the other hand, however, they are aware of their limitations and try to find ways to compensate for their absence. These teams are effective under the following conditions: (Smith, 2004, in Cleland, 2004; Larson, Gray, 2014)

- ❖ They have up to 10 members.
- ❖ The team members participate in the team by their own choice.
- ❖ The team members belong to the team from the beginning to the end of the project.
- ❖ The team members work on a full-time basis.
- ❖ The members report only to the project leader and the project leader to the top management.
- ❖ Main functions – at least marketing, engineering and production – all part of the team.
- ❖ The team members are situated in close proximity of each other and can communicate.
- ❖ The members are part of the organizational structure which stimulates cooperation and trust.

The specialized literature provides an *evaluation matrix of the efficiency of project teams*. (Constructing Excellence, 2004) This matrix includes the following key elements which influence the efficiency of project teams: team identification; shared vision; communication; collaboration and participation; constructive solving of controversial issues; self-evaluation of the activity of each team member. In this way the matrix provides a 5-stage evaluation of the development of these elements (0, 1, 2, 3, 4).

The members of the project teams are usually people who are part of different structural units of the organization and various institutions and should be included in the given projects. On the other hand, knowledge sharing in the project team is crucial because this is the linking unit between the team members and leads to saving resources and improves performance. As a rule, in their skills, team members complement each other and generate synergy through coordinated efforts which makes it possible for each member to strengthen their advantages and reduce their weaknesses. Knowledge sharing in the project team can improve the team performance and its potential for innovation. Therefore, knowledge sharing within the project team is considered to be a key factor for success and a driving force for innovation. Knowledge sharing has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, strengthens collaboration between the structural units and thus has a favorable effect on the competitiveness of the organizations. However, knowledge sharing has certain drawbacks such as: it can influence negatively the competitive advantages of the organization; it can result in loss of jobs; mainstream thinking members limit the volume of knowledge. (Navimipour, Charband, 2016)

2 AIM AND METHODS

The aim of this paper is to present key activities and factors related to the effective functioning of project teams as flexible units which accomplish complex projects with limited resources and insufficient time. Various research approaches and methods are used in the publication: systemic, process and situational approaches; desk analysis of specialized scientific publications on the topic; analysis and synthesis methods; observation, analogy, comparison methods etc.

3 THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER IN BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PROJECT TEAM

This paper supports the claim that the efficiency of project teams depends primarily on the degree to which the results from their activity facilitate the process of achieving the goals

of the interested parties in the respective project. In this way the focus is upon the fact that through the process under consideration the attention of all interested parties in the project is directed towards the achievement of the strategic goals of the organization. Along with that, a more efficient spending of organizational resources is guaranteed which is in compliance with the strategic priorities for organizational development and minimizing risks when building the project portfolio. In that respect the project manager plays a significant role since with the limited time available he has to systematically consider the management of the relations with the interested parties in the project. The fifth edition of the methodology for project management of the Project Management Institute (PMI) PMBoK® has 10 chapters focusing on different group processes. The publication includes a new chapter focusing on the management of the interested parties in the project. According to PMBoK® the management of interested parties is a combination of interrelated processes used to define the interested parties in the project and to plan and control the activities related to their management. [PMI, 2013]

The adequate leadership style of the project manager exerts positive impact on the performance of the project team. Certain qualities of the project managers like: charisma, readiness to share responsibility, prioritizing the team interests to the individual interests of its members, encouraging both team development and of each of its members, willingness to take risks, collaboration etc. should be highly appreciated. “Team management involves activities related to tracking the performance of its individual members and the team as a whole, obtaining feedback, identifying and resolving problems, coordinating and harmonizing changes that have occurred in order to improve the processes involved in the project.”(Andreev, 2006, p. 91)

Therefore, a number of challenges related to the successful activity of the project manager should be considered.

Firstly, the project manager is in charge of the respective project in the context of strategic priorities for the development of the organization and in this way contributes to the accomplishment of its development strategy.

Secondly, the project manager carries out his obligations in the context of uncertainty and ongoing changes in the structure of the project tasks. It often happens that decisions should be made without sufficient information about the factors of the environment which considerably constrains the project manager when forecasting their changes and the process of taking adequate managerial decisions.

Thirdly, the project manager is responsible for the changes that have occurred during the project work and has to make special efforts to resolve conflicts.

Fourth, the project manager functions in a dynamic environment within the respective project cycle and is responsible for conducting successfully the multifunctional tasks. Special attention should be paid to projects that involve a number of organizational departments as well as external organizations and it is compulsory to establish good coordination among them.

Fifth, the project manager should encourage unconventional and creative solutions. Therefore, the risk of encountering more problems when the project team has relatively limited experience related to conducting the respective type of project should not be underestimated.

Sixth, the performance of the project manager contributes a lot to the development of the project team and the success of the respective project.

The project manager should lead the project team by becoming its leader. To achieve this goal the successful project managers resort to a variety of methods and means which, on the one hand, depend on their personal qualities, communication skills, experience, professional expertise, and on the other, on the project characteristics and the surrounding environment.

Special emphasis should be put on transformational leadership because the most important task of the successful project manager is to integrate the efforts of each member into the accomplishment of the team tasks. In this way transformational leadership leads to the achievement of the following outcomes: adequate response to challenges involved in the process; motivating the others by sharing the vision; delegating rights to the others to act; outlining the course of action and encouraging the followers. (Kouzes, Posner, 2002) It should be explicitly pointed out that transformational leadership plays a leading role in project-oriented organizations in the following four areas: emotionally following the leader; efficient motivation; intellectual motivation and individual approach to every team member. (Aga, 2016)

The successful leadership style of the project manager is defined in terms of different aspects. On the one hand, he should implement situational approach and demonstrate flexibility by adjusting to the specific characteristics of the respective project. On the other hand, the good project manager implements efficient motivational techniques which help him involve the project team members so that they become fully committed to the successful realization of the project. In this way he does everything within his power to facilitate the taking of efficient group decisions by utilizing in the best possible way the knowledge, skills

and experience of the members of the project team. It is within his responsibilities to make sure on regular basis that potential conflicts are avoided while working on the project.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it should be stated that the project team plays an essential role in successfully completing the respective project. The members of the effective team work on the project from the very beginning to its end and the project is seen as a considerable challenge in the professional field of all members of the project team. The productive team is aware of the knowledge, skills and abilities of each of its members. It recognizes the rights of each member whose expertise and professional skills are critical to the completion of the project goals. Furthermore, it is important that in the effective project team diverse opinions, creative ideas and readiness for risk taking are encouraged.

REFERENCES

AGA, D. A. 2016. Transformational leadership and project success: The mediating role of team-building. In *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 34, Issue 5, July 2016, pp. 806-818

ANDREEEV, O. 2006. Project management. S., "Softtrade", 2006, ISBN: 9543340374. (In Bulgarian)

BAIDEN, B. K., A. D. F. PRICE, A. R. J. DAINITY. 2006. The extent of team integration within construction projects. In *International Journal of Project Management* 24 (1), 2006, pp. 13-23

BAIDEN, B. K., A. D. F. PRICE. 2011. The effect of integration on project delivery team effectiveness. In *International Journal of Project Management* 29, 2011, pp. 129–136

CONSTRUCTING EXCELLENCE. Effective Teamwork. A Best Practice Guide for the Construction Industry. 2004. Constructing Excellence, Watford, 2004 (www.constructingexcellence.org.uk) (http://constructingexcellence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Teamwork_Guide.pdf)

KOUZES, J. M., & B. Z. POSNER. 2002. The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002, ISBN-13: 978-0787974008.

KUZMANOVA, M., M. ALEXANDROVA. Management. Theory and Praxis. S., "Vezni-4", 2013, ISBN: 978-954-9977-57-8. (In Bulgarian)

LARSON, E. W., C. F. G;RAY. 2014. Project Management. The Managerial Process. Sixth Ed., McGraw-Hill International Education, 2014, ISBN: 978-9339212032.

NAVIMIPOUR, N. J., Y. CHARBAND. Knowledge sharing mechanisms and techniques in project teams: Literature review, classification, and current trends. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 62, September 2016, pp. 730-742

PMI. 2013. Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), Fifth Ed., Project Management Institute, PE, ISBN-13: 978-1935589679.

SMITH, PR. G. Concurrent Product-Development Teams. 2004. In Cleland, D. I., Field guide to project management, 2nd ed. New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, 2004, ISBN: 0-471-46212-8 (Cloth).

CONTACT

Nadya Kuzmanova

University of National and World Economy

Faculty of Management and Administration

1700 Sofia, Student Town, UNWE, Bulgaria

nadya_kuzmanova@abv.bg