10 Rules of Highly Successful Project Management

~ By Lisa Ahn

The Project Management Institute defines project management as “the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements” (PMBOK Guide, 3rd Edition, Project Management Institute Inc., PN, 2005). To sum up, project management is all about making the project happen. It is a discipline of initiating, planning, executing, and managing resources with the goal of completing specific deliverables within budget and time.

A successful project manager is one who can envision the entire project from start to finish, and have the prowess to realise this vision. To keep pace with business and IT, project managers need to make their management practices more flexible.

1. Be Agile

Traditional project management methodologies are proving to be too rigid, bureaucratic, and time consuming for today’s dynamic business environment. In fact, these methodologies can work against IT departments. Today, you need to respond with agility to rising issues and changes. The formal documentation and processes involved in traditional project management can weigh you down.

2. Do Not Micromanage

The ideal project managers are leaders, not control freaks. Some project managers can be overly analytical and invest too much time in perfecting details, when they should really focus on achieving milestones and the completion of the project. Flexible project management requires a balance of both the left and right brain, hard and soft skills.

3. Keep Improving Your Project Management Practice

Technology is always evolving to meet the changing needs of users. In the same way, your approach to project management should evolve alongside business and IT processes. Communicate with your team, client, and business partners, as to how you can improve your project management practices.
4. Ongoing Planning

The single most important activity of project managers is planning. Planning must be detailed, organised, and require team participation. And like the real world, plans always change and reprioritise with situations. For this, plan, re-plan, and plan.

5. Work with a Sense of Urgency

Wouldn't it be great to work with an unlimited pool of time, money, and resources? Here on Earth, however, we have fixed 24 hours in a 7-day week, and we have been taught early on of the importance of spending within our means. Because projects are constricted with a set timeline, budget, and resources, it is of utmost importance that the project process is constantly being driven towards completion. Regular updates, meetings, and follow-ups are essential.

6. Visualise and Communicate all Project Deliverables and Activities

In short, the project manager and team must have a picture of the finished deliverables in the minds of everyone involved. This guides everyone in the same direction. Avoid vague descriptions at all costs, be specific, draw diagrams and pictures, and make certain everyone agrees with it.

7. Complete Deliverables Step-by-Step

The thought of climbing a mountain in one go can be crippling. But to see it as a succession of steps and peaks is less intimidating and more achievable. In the same way, you don't want to jump in a project with the intent of building all project deliverables at once. Work on each item step-by-step, get process reviews and approvals, and always maintain a sense of direction.

8. Healthy Risk Management

Assign a risk officer who will be responsible for detecting potential project issues. You want someone who has a healthy dose of skepticism:

- All team members should not hesitate to report concerns or challenges.
- Maintain a live project risk database that tracks all issues and resolutions.
- Do not obsess. Assessing risks should not be your main priority. The last thing you want is to be wasting your time and resources on risk management, as it will prevent you from ever completing a project, let alone give you the courage to start it. Remember, you want a healthy dose of risk management, not a crippling one.

9. Open Communication

Communication is vital in all aspects of project management. Adhere to a policy of open communication, encouraging all members to voice opinions and concerns. This cuts through waiting games and significantly reduces the risk of mistakes, saving you time and money.
10. Never Lose Sight of the 3-Factors: Time, Budget, and Quality

While project management practices have changed to be more flexible and open, the foundation remains the same. Project success occurs when it is delivered on time, within budget, with a level of deliverables that are satisfactory to the client. The project manager's main role is to keep all team members aware of these big three - Time, Budget and Quality.

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