Keeping Tabs on Projects

~ By Kenneth Darter

Projects have a lot of moving parts. When you throw multiple projects into the mix, as most organisations do, then knowing where projects stand is essential. In order to manage multiple projects, the leaders of the organisation executing the projects need to be able to keep tabs on everything. This could be happening through emails, meetings, informal conversations, formal reports or even a combination of these, depending on how the organisation and project managers are organised.

In order for the organisation to effectively manage the ongoing projects, though, there needs to be a systematic way of keeping tabs on everything without digging through old emails or meeting presentations. The stakeholders and decision makers should establish a working relationship with the project managers in order to fully support them and make the projects successful.

Leadership Teams

One of the first priorities is to identify the leadership teams and the roles they have within the overall managing of the projects and programmes. By identifying those individuals and what roles they will play on the project, the project manager will understand what information they will need during project execution. The project manager will also understand the information they need before a project begins and after the project is complete. The project manager should be able to work with all the leadership teams whether their involvement is minimal or fully engaged in a day-to-day capacity.

Micro-updates Versus Full Updates

A full update on the project would involve monitoring and updating the schedule along with the risk, issue and scope plans. There might also be certain information requested by the project management plan and a formal presentation to stakeholders. This kind of update is often performed weekly or monthly and is the purview of the project manager or the project office.

A micro-update to the project, on the other hand, is not nearly as involved. A micro-update might be a
simple daily or weekly email with some pertinent information. It might be a sentence or two on each project provided through a messaging application used by the organisation. Whatever it is, it'll be small. It will not give the full picture of the project. For someone in the leadership team who needs to keep daily tabs on multiple projects, though, it can be very helpful. These updates could even be provided by the very people working directly on executing the project.

Status Board

A status board can be very helpful to project teams. This board could be a physical whiteboard in the office (although this can get messy or accidentally erased). It could be a virtual message board like SharePoint (great for virtual teams). While the leadership teams and stakeholders are looking for specific information on the overall status, the project team working on the project will need to see detailed information.

The status board might have the latest deadlines and the current status of specific tasks, including how they're assigned out and when updates are expected. The open nature of a virtual status board means that any team member can contribute useful information. The project manager or project management team will need to collect and corral this information and follow-up on tasks if needed.

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Keeping tabs on projects means that you're staying ahead of the curve. You can identify problems and roadblocks before they negatively impact the project. Whatever method you identify to keep tabs on the project, it should help the project manager and the organisation leadership know where they should concentrate their efforts to help the project team succeed – and that leads to a successful project for everyone.

What about you? How do you keep tabs on projects? Share your secrets to staying ahead of the curve in the comments.