Project Expectation Management – A Quality Approach to Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract

This paper investigates the current challenges faced by the project managers in creating realistic expectations of customers in dynamic changing project environment which are created by rapid introduction of new unknowns, as they progress. One might say they are more akin to packing boxes of frogs without a cover, setting each thing right before a new challenge is faced. The difficulties posed by these projects are identified and the literature is reviewed for suitable approaches.

Why do projects fail and what more is critical to the success of project? All projects are conceived with a vision to satisfy certain needs of the business. Hence, the beneficiary of these needs become key stakeholder. Appropriate participation of this key stakeholder in steering the project ensures the success of the project. Also businesses are impacted by competition and changing market place resulting in skewed expectation management.

Managing expectations enhances the success of the project immensely. Now, goal of the project plays a pivotal role and hence respecting it, is an important task, in project management. Project governance is an important aspect which needs to change according to the requirements and requires a dynamic approach rather than a 'rule book approach'.

Key Words: Project management, Lean, Scrum, Agile, Expectation Management

I. Introduction

The connotation that has always been associated with Project Management is more like an inward focused activity [2]. An assignment given by the customer has to be delivered in time and within cost constraints by working out permutations and combinations of resources across the phases of the project lifecycle. The execution has more mechanical approach rather than a dynamic one which actually misses out the main objective, for which the project was conceived, the need, the business requirement.

The key to successful project management is to anticipate the needs and problems of customers and to set realistic expectations through customer education and communication strategies. When it is not possible to give the customer what they would like, it is still possible for a customer to feel that he or she has been heard and has been treated fairly. A number of techniques have concerns about calling customers and telling them the company understands; giving the customer the best explanation they can; and being open and honest with customers concerning laws and policies of the organization. Being professional and considerate of customers enhance their view of the organization even when the customer may be disappointed with the outcome.

Expectations are difficult to control and impossible to turn off. But by understanding, the vital role they play, one can do a better job of managing them, and in the process dramatically improve the quality, impact and effectiveness of services.

Providing a flexible yet controlled process that can be used to deliver solutions, project management combines effective use of people's knowledge together with techniques such as iterative development and modeling to achieve tight project delivery timescales. It

offers flexibility while still recognizing the processes that give project manager's confidence to run their projects effectively.

We live in an uncertain world where it is difficult to predict what will happen in the future. As governments and organizations face unprecedented budget cuts, but are still under pressure to perform and deliver, project managers face tough challenges. Unforeseen situations, budget cuts and organizational changes can have a dramatic impact on project outcomes. The key to successfully manage projects is to break them into stages, plan the current stage in detail and be flexible regarding the subsequent stages.

Lean – an approach which originated in the Toyota manufacturing environment in the 1940s. Lean drives work to be done in an efficient way through its main principle of "Eliminating Waste". In practice, this means avoiding anything that does not produce value for the customer. Examples of lean thinking are "don't do all the detailed analysis up front, because it will change/ some will not be progressed to delivery" and "test throughout, then you don't waste time working on things that do not fit the business". A lean approach can be applied at development level, but it is also often used at the organizational level. Lean is often used in conjunction with other.

Agile approaches, since it is complementary to most of them, e.g. Lean and DSDM Atern, Lean and Scrum, Lean and XP especially cover IT projects. Organizations seeking to adopt an agile approach are sometimes concerned about some of the messages and myths of agile, and it can be very difficult to separate rumour from fact. For example, some agile approaches suggest that project management is irrelevant or unnecessary – a very worrying message for organizations that rely on their project managers, and

organizations[1] that may have invested heavily in creating a pool of experienced and accredited project managers. This has led to an incorrect perception that agile is only applicable for small, simple pieces of work, and that organizations would need to choose both agile or formal project management and corporate processes. However, this perception is incorrect[2]. One advantage of agile project management for the organization is that they can adopt an agile approach that has a track record of successful management and delivery in the corporate environment, and an approach that complements and works with existing corporate processes, quality and audit processes, etc. Indeed there is no need to develop and integrate company-specific agile management processes; the organization can simply adopt a tried and tested approach.

II. Author's Contribution

Create expectation with caution because Success of Project = Actual Performance / Expectations. Exceeding customer expectations will lead to customer delight and performing below may cause losses beyond repair loss could be loss of trust, customer retention issues, repeat orders etc,. Thus, project expectations management will involve following action points:

1. Create realistic expectations
2. Establish goals and tracking
3. Involve the customer and the end user of the product
4. Business outcome based reporting of status
5. Clarity and remove ambiguity.
6. Perception measurement and management
7. Focus on customer needs.
8. Communicate to work teams and keep them updated. Communicate while mile stones are achieved.

III. Conclusion

Every project is different and each has different expectations which are the whole purpose of handling project expectations and hence termed as expectation management. Expectation management begins and ends only with the life cycle of the project. In conclusion the traits of a successful project manager using synergistic project management that can be achieved in the following steps:

1. Delivering projects without losing focus on customer goals.
2. Being conscientious in observing happenings in customer's environment and their own.
3. Skilled at managing both customer expectations and perceptions.
4. Teams bring collective strength, bonding and thriving
5. Using networking skills to build these relationships.
6. Being realistic and paraphrasing positively.
7. Taking control. Not simply expecting or waiting for things to happen.

Processes, tools and techniques for implementing expectation management in projects are the immediate requirement of project management community and changing business dynamics.

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