7

Project Human Resources Management

(itSMF Egypt Chapter Establishment Project Case Study)

Rania Al-Maghraby[1]

"He whose deeds decelerate him, his pedigree would not accelerate him"
Mohammed (PBUH)

Abstract - **This paper focuses on the Human Resources related aspects in the Project Management area. It presents mainly the human related issues faced by project managers through out the project lifecycle, by highlighting best practices and addressing common painful points. An applied case study is presented at the end.**

Index Terms - **Leadership, Project Human Resources Management, Project Staffing, Project Team Development, Project Team Management.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Project Human Resources Management refers to the processes of organizing and managing the project team. It's common to speak about assigning roles and responsibilities to project staff, but the team involvement in the planning and decision-making is important as well, as this adds expertise and strengthens commitment to the project and helps for accurate estimation of several project parameters which depend on the level of expertise and performance of the project team.

The project human resources management includes planning for the project human resources needs and required roles and responsibilities, acquiring the project team needed to accomplish the project work, development of the project team by building expertise and enhancing core competencies and managing the project team through continuous follow up and tracking of the progress of the work assigned, as well as leading the staff and resolving issues. As such, the project human resources management spans through the whole project lifecycle and should be paid attention to.

In the following five sections, I try to present a number of the most common and important issues regarding project team management, that can be faced during any stage of the project and which I believe the project manager should be considering while leading and managing the project team throughout the project lifecycle in order to get from the project team the desired result that achieves the project objectives and be satisfactory to the project team and other stakeholders. In the sixth and last section, an applied case study is presented.

[1]Rania Al-Maghraby is an independent project manager from Egypt. She is PMP® certified, ITIL® Foundation certified and holds M.Sc. degree in Computer Science. She is the president of the *it*SMF Egypt Chapter.

II. VIRTUAL & DISTRIBUTED TEAMS MANAGEMENT

How much distance separates the people that will be part of the project? Are they in different buildings, time zones, or countries? Distributed teams are needed in some cases in order to add special expertise when the expert is not in the same demographic area, incorporate employees who work from home offices, include people who work different shifts, or include people with mobility handicaps. Managing a project whose resources are scattered demographically among several countries poses a special challenge. Team members in this case miss the collaborative advantage of co-location and thus need additional efforts to maintain productive environment. Besides, there are barriers of cultural difference, time zone difference and conventions and regulations differences.

The following are the main points to consider when managing distributed project teams.

Communication: Special attention should be paid in this case in order not to get the team loose relationship and belonging to one team. Interaction through high tech tools on frequent timeframes is essential. Although you may not be able to choose who will be part of your team, you can make a difference in how well they gel together.

Follow Up and Tracking: The project manager shouldn't get in mess due to lack of co-location of the project team. Continual check points with individual team members will keep them concentrated and responsible for their task in hand.

Motivation and Involvement: To be caring for the project success, the team member must be motivated to achieve and buy in to the project. Continuous "Thank You" and acknowledgement expressions will result in the desired objective.

Alignment of Conventions and Work Practices: Chances are these scattered team members used to follow different practices and procedures to conduct their work, perhaps through different tools and formats. The project manager has to take care of clarifying and aligning these practices throughout the project lifecycle. It's also essential for the project manager to account for the need to transfer knowledge between team members who can't interact face-to-face. This will help alignment of conventions and practices and will also encourage team involvement and belonging, in addition to leveraging the team competence rank.

Management Support: For the members of the distributed team to be effective, they must receive support from their respective direct management in their location. This will enforce their commitment to the project, as well as

empowering the project manager's authority over the project team members.

Resource Availability: Members of a distributed team are highly likely to have conflicting schedules, with each of them having his own agenda. Resource Availability refers to the time periods each team member can work on the project. The project manager need to have a good understanding of each member schedule conflicts and to plan accordingly.

Another point that worth mentioning here is the cost management side in the case of distributed teams. Naturally, additional costs will be incurred to cover the additional communication needs and to account for the estimated impacts of risks associated with this type of project teams.

Challenges show up even when the team members are in the same demographic area, but scattered outside the organization for other purposes of the project. However, challenges in this case are at a smaller scale. In either case, it's the responsibility of the project manager to handle and align the project team.

III. PROJECT TEAM DEVELOPMENT

The project team members should have been selected based on the skills and capacity required to carry out the project tasks. If, however, the project team don't possess the needed competencies, due to lack of skilled resources or project need of new technology knowledge, the project performance may be impacted. In this case, responses such as current team development, new hiring, plan modifications, or scope changes should be taken by the project manager. In most of cases, team development through training and other development techniques will be the best choice, as it results in retained knowledge assets by acquiring new skills. Nonetheless, these activities should be restricted by the project schedule and budget limits and should be arranged in coordination with the organization's training and development responsible; normally the human resources management team.

Project team development objectives can be accomplished through techniques such as professional networking and awareness building, knowledge transfer, training, motivation through rewards and recognition and application of general management and leadership skills.

Professional Networking: Informal interactions with others in an organization or industry is a constructive way to understand political and interpersonal factors that will affect team performance. Human resources networking activities may include proactive correspondence, luncheon meetings, informal conversation and trade conferences.

Knowledge Transfer: Individual team members normally have different levels and areas of expertise, as they had different backgrounds through their careers. In order for the team to talk in common terminology and for the sake of project performance, knowledge transfer methods should be planned to develop the competence of the project team. This activity promotes the feeling of mutual trust and cohesiveness among team members and leads to raising productivity level through more effective teamwork.

Training & Learning: Continuous education is essential for the continual improvement of capabilities and skills at the organization level and at the personal level as well. At the project level, the project manager should assess and plan for the education needs of the project team, according to the project requirements and the team skills and expertise.

There is a difference, however, between Training and Learning. For Training, managers identify shortfalls in what employees know, then they act accordingly to get that information into the employee's knowledge. Training defines itself as an information delivery system. Whether it is conducted by people in classrooms or on the job, or by machine in the form of videotape or multimedia. It is a static, measurable thing that brings employees up to the desired state, as defined by management. Training is not an end by itself; it is a means to an end. Learning, on the other hand, happens entirely in the learner's head on job. Learning is an end in itself, not a means to an end.

Training wants to cover the greatest amount of ground in the shortest time, with the fewest interruptions and the highest degree of learner homogeneity. Learning, by contrast, knows no clock, respects no formal structure and occurs in as many ways and at as many paces as there are learners.

Motivation: Motivation is one of the most important and essential leadership skills used for project team development. "You need to be able to motivate your team if you want to create a productive work environment. By combining good motivational practices with meaningful work, the setting of performance goals and use of an effective reward system, you can establish the kind of atmosphere and culture that you need to excel. That's a win-win for you, them and the organization … *However well you're doing, you'll often find ways to get even better*" [2].

According to [1], different things motivate different people, as shown in Fig. 1:

Doers are people who themselves wish to be leaders, to be in charge of something, people who need the least direction because they are already motivated by nature to expend great effort to achieve things. The best motivation for them is being in charge of something, so give them more responsibilities and authority.

Creatives are people who easily generate new ideas and fresh perspectives. Their motivator is new and challenging assignments requiring interaction with lots of interesting or powerful people.

Socials are people who like working with other people and derive greatest satisfaction from communicating and relating to other people. Their motivator is the awareness of appreciation; they need to be told how much they are valued by the company and what's more important, by you personally.

Thinkers are those who are talented in reasoning and able to achieve deep understanding of issues and facts. The most important thing for them is to be right and their motivator is knowledge. The chance to acquire new, rich information is like a trip to Disney World for them.

Thinkers being right	Doers being in charge
Socials being appreciated	Creatives being heard

Fig. 1. Motivators by personality type

Besides, as motivational tools, the organizational process assets existing in the organization for reward and recognition purposes should be available to the project manager as part of the project management tools, such as certificates of appreciation, bulletin boards, corporate apparel, bonus or recognition dinners.

Role Switching: Performing a "Job Swap" exercise helps with promoting empathy and common understanding among the team members. This allows people to see a situation from another's point of view. By switching roles with someone, even for one working day, the individual gains an insight into a particular situation. Taking a different role naturally generates interest and curiosity in fellow workers' points of view. Besides, this also can be a great generator of innovative ideas when things are practiced and seen by new viewpoints.

Equality of Opportunity: The equality of opportunityin the development of people should be observed and applied in a way that takes into consideration the different needs and career paths of different individuals and groups of people. This should be recognized and admitted by the project team members to believe that the project manager is genuinely committed to providing equal development opportunities; this will directly boast their performance. People should also clearly understand what their development activities should achieve, both for them and for the project.

IV. PROJECT TEAM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The project manager should be continually monitoring and tracking all of the project activities, among which is monitoring and evaluating project team performance and giving feedback and taking corrective actions according to the results of this evaluation to resolve issues and address conflicts and improve team performance in general. In addition, the evaluation processes help determining how effective training and development activities had been and measuring feedback from customers (if any) on the services they were receiving from staff.

Observation: The project manager should stay close to the work and attitude of project team members. He should monitor the project progress, milestone achievements and team interpersonal issues. The only way you can do it is by sitting among the team you are working with and listening to what's going on. As well as you encourage feedback, it is better to be sitting there and hearing it first hand.

Giving Feedback: Feedback doesn't necessarily need to be negative, acknowledgement of good performance is a positive feedback that need to be communicated. In the case of negative feedback, it shouldn't be conveyed in a way that's destructive and discouraging for self-improvement, people should receive appropriate constructive feedback on a timely and regular basis. Evaluation information can be collected from people who interact with project team members using a 360-degree feedback, meaning that feedback regarding individual performance is provided from many sources instead of single point of view. In this process, a questionnaire is completed, maybe online, by individuals including peers, suppliers, clients, subordinates and superiors. The results represent an objective view of the individual and highlight performance areas for improvement.

Recognition: We have all seen the positive results of recognition in our own lives, but often in the workplace recognition is overlooked as schedules become increasingly busier. Frequently, recognition is viewed as "nice to have" but not a priority. However, working in a culture that does not support recognition can lead to burnout, decreased performance, de-motivation and even reduced profitability. The development of a "Culture of Recognition" can support improved engagement, productivity and alignment. It's important to view recognition not just as an isolated tool, but as a part of an integrated human resources strategy that incorporates compensation, benefits, work culture, recognition, performance management, strategic alignment and career development. Important to note, in order to get team members united as a group, establish a reward structure that matches this desired outcome. A team will fall apart if members are asked to cooperate but are rewarded based on individual performance. Team-based reward is particularly crucial when team members are heavily interdependent on each other.

V. PROJECT TEAM LEADERSHIP

"Leadership can be defined as the gritty business of getting people to do what you want them to do. And you do that by scaring them or by inspiring them" [1]. No two members on your team will be quite alike, each occupies a spot on a continuum, stretching from easy-to-lead to difficult-to-lead. Generate enthusiasm and commitment through your leadership. Nurturing open communication contributes to development of trust and trust is the main driver of managing people effectively.

Leadership vs. Management: "A manager's job is to keep an existing machine running; a leader's job is to continually change the machine, always looking for a better way to meet team goals" [1]. Managers ensure that work gets done, focus on day to day tasks and manage the activities of others. They focus on tactical activities and often times have a more directive and controlling approach. For leaders, rather than directing employees through tasks, they inspire and motivate employees to drive themselves. While managers receives their authority based on their role, the leaders authority is innate in their approach. Good leadership skills are difficult to learn because they are far more behavioral in nature than those

skills needed for management. This is one reason that building characteristics of a leader can be so challenging for new managers. A commonly coined phrase tells us that leadership is doing the right thing and management is doing things right.

In an important sense, leaders are also very focused on change. Leading their teams through change, rather than manage them through it, has infinite rewards. Being able to blend the two styles of managers and leaders is truly a unique skill set. Keep in mind that there is an abundance of managers in the world but very few truly embody the characteristics of a leader.

Authority: In general, a project manager may or may not have authority over the project team members, according to the organization structure. An organization whose basic structure is a weak matrix means a relatively weaker authority for the project manager, since the project team members are accountable to both a functional manager and the project manager. This consequently affects the level of control and leadership power the project manager can assume over the project team. Effective management of this dual reporting relationship is often a critical success factor for the project and is generally the responsibility of the project manager. If your team members see you manage a project without distraction, they will want to emulate your focus.

Ground Rules: Norms and rules should be set first hand at new project kick off time. Without good structure to the group, it doesn't matter how great the people are, they will flounder if they don't have the systems in place. Project managers must deploy explicit vision, mission and instruction statements to set healthy norms that encourage cooperation, support and mutual interest. Otherwise, team members may fall into unhealthy behavior competition, power struggles, conflict and self-interest. In addition to covering how to conduct meetings, evaluate progress and communication and reporting disciplines, project managers should discuss team members expectations and behaviors. This practice gets them thinking about the goal from the start and creates in them an outward focus rather than internal focus.

Conflict Management: When managed properly, differences in opinion can be healthy and leading to increased creativity and better decision making. However, when differences become negative factor, project team members are responsible for solving their conflicts. But if conflict escalates to the project manager, he should help facilitate a satisfactory compromise. Try to maintain a focus on the future; when people are in severe conflict, they become present-focused and cannot see the long-term consequence of their current action. You should be careful not to take sides and to always be unbiased. Project managers must resist the urge to have people discuss interpersonal conflicts. Interpersonal conflicts are different from the creative conflicts that lead to great ideas, because they concentrate on personalities, not business. Conflicts should be addressed early and usually in private, but increasingly formal procedures may be followed as disciplinary actions if disruptive conflict continues. Early establishment of team ground rules clarifies expectations regarding acceptable behavior. Commitment to these rules decreases conflicts and encourages productivity.

People Skills: The soft skills of the project manager are as important as the technical skills. You need to possess skills like negotiating team acquisition, motivating team, communication with them and getting their attention and resolving conflicts and solving problems, as well as possessing technical skills like schedule development or conducting risk assessment. If you don't have the people skills, you are going to rely on pushing people to do things without being able to motivate them. A person may not be a particularly good social communicator, yet he can learn that skill and apply it in a professional setting. People skills are crucial whenever you have teams and they are even more crucial when it comes to project management, where you are trying to get people attention and push along a schedule that is not necessarily aligned with what those people see as their own schedule. Never manage personnel; manage people. A project manager may not necessarily realize deficiencies in people skills and therefore continually attribute failure to technical issues. Project managers may be working in complete ignorance of their personal impact on those around them. This creates a situation in which people management skills will never be addressed, let alone developed. People skills, although being that essential, sometimes don't receive proper attention from some organizations. According to [12], SPC, a UK based business performance consultancy, has conducted a research that was able to identify a tendency for managers to be promoted on the grounds of technical skills, longevity of employment, popularity within the company and even family connections, before people skills are considered. Small wonder then that people skills are ignored by the organizational discipline.

Teamwork Balance: Project managers must also realize their projects may not be the only work a functional team member is expected to accomplish. As a result, too much "Teamwork" may be counterproductive. First, project managers should determine which tasks can be carried out by individuals and which should be a collaborative effort. People can work independently up to a certain point, depending on the project, later in a project, when individuals are building upon each other's work, you need more team cohesion. If project managers focus on teamwork too early, though, busy employees may be frustrated and consider the group work an annoyance.

Delegation: Although a project manager can't delegate everything in a project, assigning some tasks to others on the team may be more effective. Yet many project managers are reluctant to pass along responsibilities. Most project managers who come from technical backgrounds aren't accustomed to delegating. They don't feel comfortable delegating because they were not confident with their people. To be able to delegate, you need to be conscious that you have a team-that you have people who can help you achieve project success. Delegating some of your duties only makes your work easier. You'll have more time to manage your project, monitor team members and handle conflicts. When delegating, however, you need to match the job to the person, not just to select the member who is not busy or more convenient. Delegation allows you to make the best use of your time and skills and it helps other people in the team grow and develop.

VI. Tools & Techniques for Project Human Resources Management

The following are some of the tools and techniques that are useful for managing human resources of a project.

Project Organization Chart: A project organization chart is a graphic display of project team members and their reporting relationships according to their respective roles and responsibilities within the project. It can be formal or informal, highly detailed or broad, based on the needs of the project. At the planning stage, project organization charts provide an overview regarding the number of people needed for the project. The project organization chart and clear job descriptions, detailing people's responsibilities and areas of accountability, help people understand the importance of their contribution to the project.
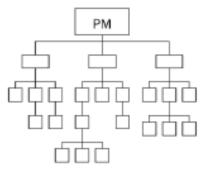

Fig. 2. Organization Chart Example [5]

Resource Histograms: A histogram is a graphical method in which a single bar represents the level of allocation of each of the human resources of the project, which may be an individual team member, or a group of resources. It can also show an upper limit for resource allocation to help spotting the over allocated resources and acting accordingly through other techniques, like resource leveling, to balance load across several resources.
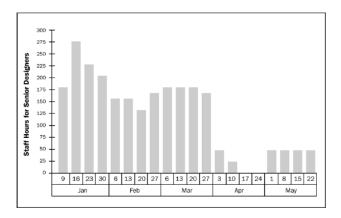

Fig. 3. Resource Histogram Example [5]

Resource Leveling: It's a technique used to balance workload among different resources of the project. In this technique, the overloaded resource assignments are revised and either rescheduling takes place to move the overlapping tasks to different timeframes, or the load of a specific task is shared with another resource with less workload. The resource histogram is consulted while applying this technique for reference to the actual load and for checking the effectiveness of applying the resource leveling technique in achieving the desired balance.

VII. Case Study: *it*SMF Egypt Chapter Establishment Project Team

During our work for the establishment project of the *it*SMF Egypt Chapter, while the project manager being myself, I can summarize some of the useful lessons-learned related to project team management we faced throughout the project life cycle.

Accidental Leadership: The startup of this project took place by an initiative from myself to establish a chapter in Egypt for the *it*SMF organization and the team members weren't recruited for the project, they just showed the same interest of establishing this chapter in Egypt. And so, the case has evolved to being there a project and being there a project team and I'm the pivotal person in charge and I just have to lead and manage. That's why I call it *accidental leadership*, it wasn't a direct assignment and the team formation and structure didn't go straight forward. It was a special case and a project of a special nature. It was a chance that I seized and liked. Consequently, my main challenge while dealing with this project team was to plant a feeling rooted deep inside each of the team members that *their project is in safe hands*.

Team Self-Organization: The project team members were professionals of high rank, a number of them more senior than the project manager, which posed some challenge and required more toughness. They were, however, mature and cooperative enough to make overcoming this obstacle doable. The project team members were more like colleagues rather than subordinates and because we all shared the same interest and same objective, they came with ready buy-in to the project and the roles and responsibilities assigned to each of us were just a point of organization; we all were fully aware of that. We used to make our decisions based on inputs from all of us, to nurture team spirit, encourage commitment and to share our expertise. However, when it comes to urgent cases, autocracy was sometimes consulted in order not to miss opportunities.

The team continued to evolve along the project life cycle, as new members show interest to join every while. We always appreciated new members to join the team, especially when they are from new organizations, since this encourages exchange of knowledge, share of experience and reflection of different points of view in the IT community and market. In addition, whenever a new team member joins, we had to have an orientation session, face-to-face or by phone, in order to align and put on track the new member. This also called for team re-organization, including firing and replacement and re-distribution of roles and responsibilities.

Motivation: Due to the special nature of this project and the combination of its team, there was no authority for the project manager to hold the team members on track; no hierarchy, no escalation, no evaluation, no salary, no punishment … That's why a heavy reliance on *motivation* was the main tool to stimulate the desire to achieve for the team members. I used to

stress on the honor we all will get out of participation in this project. The project team members, being busy responsible persons at their respective organizations, needed this reminder from time to time in order not to lose track of their role in the project.

Communication: The case of this project may be classified to some degree as *distributed project team management*, that's because we didn't meet so frequent and in fact we had troubles in arranging a meeting time whenever we need to meet. The main reason is that the project team members aren't fully assigned to the project, they are not 100% dedicated, due to their many responsibilities for their own jobs, while their roles in the project were somehow voluntarily. Thus, our main communication method was number one through email and from time to time by phone. I needed to take in consideration the lack of dedication when I'm to assign tasks or track their progress. I was understanding this case very well and I trusted that all of the team members have the desire to really achieve. I was aware of their struggle with time management. However, unavailability and lack of dedication wasn't tolerated *at all* when it was to hinder project progress.

Team Work: Since the coordination between the conflicting schedules of the team members was a challenge, the most suitable way to get the work done was to divide the team members into sub-teams, each working on a separate task, which makes their coordination and meeting arrangements more doable. One of the most interesting lessons I myself learned from interaction with this team was the observation that although a certain team member gets least active and almost not productive during some periods, the same team member may afterwards become the highest performance achiever, while he might have been already marked for elimination from the team. This encourages patience in taking such decisions regarding team reformation, since people are your most precious resources.

Conflict Management: Some of the project team members were from competitor organizations, being also business leaders in the market. The nature of our project required them to share as individual professionals, regardless of their respective organizations. The chapter after all is an independent non-profit organization and there shouldn't be any bias to or against any other organization, even for sponsors. We needed to stress on this point from the beginning to clarify any existing conflicts that may create difficulties for the project progress. Whenever personal interests seemed to intervene, a rigid and tough reaction had to be taken and a reminder alarm had to be raised in order not to lose sight astray from our main objective. Again, the project team members were mature and cooperative enough to make overcoming this obstacle also doable.

The bottom line, this project team was the machinery that took over this successful achievement, although this machinery required oversight and some maintenance from time to time. The chapter establishment project started in December 2007 and lasted for 11 months to end in November 2008. In addition to project team management, the project also required interpersonal interactions with other stakeholders as well, like project sponsors and colleagues in UK and other chapters. We were able to face the challenges and we went through all of it with passion and enthusiasm. *We simply enjoyed our journey throughout the project !*

VIII. CONCLUSION

At the end, the following check list maybe useful for checking your people management skills. As a project manager you need to deal with project team members with full capacity of leadership and people management skills, which include:

- Understanding of human needs and behavior.
- How to form collaborative relationships.
- How to recruit and select staff.
- How to retain staff.
- How to formulate performance goals involving staff.
- How to monitor and measure staff performance.
- How to lead and motivate staff.
- How to communicate effectively with your staff.
- How to make your staff work effectively in teams.
- How to empathize with your staff.
- How to act as a mentor or a coach.
- The significance of work-family balance.
- How to gain commitment from your staff.
- How to create a thriving work environment.

A professionally managed and led project team yields a successful project, satisfied customer, improving organization and a trusted project manager.

REFERENCES

[1] Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley, the Accidental Leader, Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2004.
[2] Pep Up Your Motivation Skills!, Mind Tools Newsletter 97 – April 1st, 2008, "www.mindtools.com".
[3] Do You Delegate?, Mind Tools Newsletter 101 – May 27th, 2008, "www.mindtools.com".
[4] Leadership vs. Management: What are the Characteristics of a Leader and a Manager, "http://www.coach4growth.com".
[5] Project Management Institute (PMI), PMBOK® Guide, Third Edition.
[6] Mario Bourgault & Nathalie Drouin, How is Your Distributed Team Doing?, PMI® Virtual Library, 2007.
[7] Sultan Kermally, Gurus on People Management, Thorogood Publishing, 2004.
[8] The Human Resources Portal, "www.HR.com".
[9] Ryan Blair, Projects with Purpose, PM Network® magazine of PMI, Mar. 2005.
[10] Alfonso Bucero, Pass it Along, PM Network® magazine of PMI, Sep. 2006.
[11] François Chiocchio and Neville Turbit, A People Person, PM Network® magazine of PMI, Aug. 2006.
[12] Simon Kent, Better Behavior, Career Track® magazine of PMI, Nov. 2005.
[13] Ann C. Logue, Dysfunction Junction, PM Network® magazine of PMI, Aug. 2006.
[14] itSMF Egypt Chapter Establishment Project documents. itSMF Egypt Chapter website: "www.itsmf-egypt.org".