

Emotional Intelligence in Project Managers

Jordan is the project manager for a complex project across several organizations. The project is not in jeopardy, but there are warning signs – activities are late and the cost trend is just hanging on. Jordan sees these as early warning signs of trouble and has begun investigating. The issues include arguments between the different groups who are handing the project off to one another; conflicts between the staff and the manager in one particular group, disagreements about which software tool is better for a particular task, and end customers that are dissatisfied with what is being provided to them. These issues have escalated to a point where project team members are screening their phone calls -- not returning the calls of people with whom they have an ongoing conflict. It is costing the overall project time and money as two week delays due to these conflicts are becoming more and more frequent.



While the project is using cutting edge project management tools for tracking progress, cost, and schedule, Jordan knows that for these issues, a solution can't be pulled off the shelf. It is going to take Jordan's emotional intelligence to understand these team issues and the human skills to resolve them. Jordan thought that everyone was on board, but perhaps not ...

Many times when projects are implemented, with the benefit to the company being clear, there is an assumption that the project team and customer(s) will jump on board and eagerly participate in bringing the project home. Ensuring that team members and customers will be on-board, throughout the project, is rarely given enough thought and consideration. For example, while the project team members may agree that the project is good for the company their behavior comes directly from whether or not they feel the project is good for them personally. Will they be rewarded for a successful project implementation and then see some of their co-workers laid off? Will they be required to work long hours during the implementation? If so, will they receive extra money, or time off, as compensation for the additional hours? As a customer of the project, will its implementation show their work in a favorable light? Or, will it infer that they haven't known what they are doing and embarrass them? All of these questions run through their brains while evaluating the 'goodness' of the project to the individual – both at the beginning of the project, and during its implementation. Then, depending upon the evaluation, behavior follows – ranging from total commitment to total resistance and even sabotage. When the attitude becomes negative, many project managers try and explain logically why the project is a good idea – again and again, louder and louder – trying to be more convincing with the logical argument. The result of the convincing is typically anger and more resistance from the other party. The conversation isn't logical, it is emotional. And this is why emotional intelligence and human skills are critical for a Project Manager. Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, use them in thought, understand their meanings, and manage them. So – the emotionally intelligent manager understands when the conversation is emotional, vs. logical, doesn't fight it, and has the skills to go with it and produce results.



At this point, many individuals give up – believing that emotional intelligence is encoded in our DNA –you either have it or you don't. Certainly some people have a higher EQ than others – it just seems to be easier for them in highly emotional situations. They don't seem to get 'hooked' as quickly or easily. And while some people are more naturals, there are specific skills that, when learned, can raise a person's emotional intelligence performance – dramatically increasing their effectiveness within the project team and with customers. For example, implementing a project means that changes are going to happen, and change always cause conflict. Plus, the greater the diversity of the project team, or company staff, or customer group, the larger the amount of conflict. The skills of listening to both the conflict facts and emotions without getting hooked, and then working to resolve the conflict are critical – and can be learned. Once learned and practiced, the project manager becomes the person who doesn't avoid a conflict, but rather becomes first person to pull out the hidden conflict and set it squarely on the table for resolution. They understand how much time is lost and wasted with unresolved conflicts. With an increased level of human skills, project managers become intolerant of arguments and complaining about other people. They instead, push for resolutions and requests -- and expect the same from their project team and the customer. They can also 'hear' the real emotion behind the negative attitude – and know how to speak to, and acknowledge, the real emotion. When this happens, people feel truly heard and understood. They are more willing to participate – in the conversation, in the project, in resolving the issue because they feel that they will be given a chance to speak.

These skills create an environment where project team members and customers feel heard and trust that conflicts won't be allowed to slow them down. These skills have people saying, 'I want to be on that project manager's team.' So, whether or not you believe that emotional intelligence is in your personal DNA or not, take the practical step of learning the skills. It will improve your performance, the performance of your project teams, and create projects where the goals are exceeded – in cost, schedule, and in customer satisfaction.

Building Effectiveness Across Boundaries

7340 Brixham Circle
Castle Rock, CO 80108

P: 303.814.3443
TF: 866.814.3443
F: 303.688.3360

info@interfaceconsultingonline.com
www.interfaceconsultingonline.com

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