

Successful Project Management @ VallySoft

Written by VallySoft Project Manager

Tips for Building a Winning Project Team

1. It is all about team interaction and dynamics

-Internally- within the team itself:

- Foster relationships
- Communicate effectively
- Create project citizenship & cohesiveness
- Build trust and buy-in

- Externally – with the customer:

- Empathize with the customer --- feel his/her pain
- Develop relationships all levels of the customer's organization
- Build trust from the very beginning

Internally, Avoid this Scenario

“Oops, I Thought You Were Doing That”

Internally, Foster Relationships

1. Speak with each team member and align an individual's goals with the project goals

- Go beyond a typical norming session framework. In a Oneshore model, you are dealing with many different backgrounds, personal priorities, and time zones.
- Communicate roles upfront

- Communicate frequently
- Communicate upfront how people will be measured

2. Develop personal relationships with each team member from the start

- Dinners, movies and short trips together
- Appoint a social director to plan a “fun calendar”

Internally, Communicate Effectively

1. Articulate the project “Dos and Don’ts” upfront with the team

- Establish ground rules

2. Establish communication guidelines upfront and stick to them. Specifically:

- Escalation paths
- Status meeting
- Issues reporting

3. Articulate expectations. Post them in the team room.

4. Encourage team members to be good listeners.

Internally, Create Project Citizenship & Cohesiveness

1. Create good “project citizenship” – it is about each individual taking complete ownership, accountability, and pride in their role/responsibility.

2. Provide complete visibility into:

- Project deliverables
- Major issues
- Business drivers

3. Create a healthy environment:

- Free speech
- Team spirit
- Encourage team to “go the extra mile”
- Inspire the “can-do attitude”

4. Espouse team versus individual mentality-“Sum is greater than the parts.”...
Not an easy proposition with globally dispersed teams.

Internally, Build Trust and Buy-in

1. Involve team members in project estimations. Numbers have a way of creating a sense of ownership.
2. Pretend that you are the customer and question efforts along the way.
3. Emphasize quality of deliverable and it’s impact on VallySoft perception and customer relationship.
4. Get senior management to frequently meet project teams to explain the importance of what they are doing.

Other General Tips

1. Establish the “Twenty Minute Rule”
 - Team members should ask for help if they cannot solve it themselves after this time.
2. Work smarter, not necessarily harder
 - Establish repeatable processes.
 - Assess what works and codify.
 - Assess what doesn’t work and improve

3. Conduct time-study weeks to understand how your team spends their time.

Externally, Avoid this Scenario

The operation was a Success, But the patient Died!

Empathize with the Customer

1. Feel your clients' pain. Understand what keeps him/her up at night. This will give the project the business perspective it needs to avoid viewing it only from a technical standpoint.
2. The customer is a person with a business need:
 - Solve the need or the "problem"
 - Solution should make them succeed
3. What may be trivial to a programmer may be critical to a business user.
 - Empathy is key
4. Think as an end-user when designing or implementing a solution.

Externally, Develop Customer Relationships

1. Add value to your customer. That means taking the time to get to know all of them.

Specifically:

- Their role and responsibility
- If they will share the information, find out how they are measured so you can do your part in helping them achieve their goals.
- Anything about their personal life. Odds are, in a long project, you will be working with them on their birthday, wedding anniversary children's back-to-school night, etc. Being cognicant of these milestones ahead of time helps in planning meetings, etc.

2. You may be technologically superior, but the customer knows how to run his/her business better than you do. If recognized upfront, this is a powerful combination.
3. Ask yourself if you know who the “customer’s customer” is. This will help you understand the business drivers if you are a developer.

Externally, Build Trust

- Never hesitate to take the customer through details.
- Do not hide surprises for down the line. Escalate immediately.
- Keep the customer engaged.
- Try and understand your customer even when she/he appears to be unreasonable.
- Step outside your project role and put yourself into the client’s shoes.
- Think “win-win”

Of Myths and Realities...

- Myth: We have well – documented process & cookbooks.
Reality: Ask yourself: Do we use them?
- Myth: We have state of the art tools.
Reality: Ask yourself: Are my developers “tool averse?”
- Myth: If a project is behind schedule, add more people.
Reality: Adding people to a “late” project make it later.
- Myth: A statement of work is a great way to start.
We can flush things out as we go.
Reality: Poor upfront definition is a major cause of failed software projects.
- Myth: Small changes can always be accommodated as we go.
Reality: Small post design changes cause huge upheavals every time.
- Myth: Once I write the code, I will be done.
Reality: 70% of efforts expended on a project happen after code is delivered.
- Myth: Until I write the code, I have no way to truly assess impact.
Reality: quality filters are more effective in most cases than fixing downstream problems.
- Myth: Working code is the deliverable.
Reality: It is program+documentation+data.
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Author: VallySoft Project Manager
www.vallysoft.com