MANAGING PROJECTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

INTRODUCTION

A team is a group of people that work together to achieve a shared objective. The benefit of teams is that they can often achieve results that would not be possible if people were to work alone. This is because of teamwork. Teamwork is the ability to put aside personal goals and work together for a common purpose. Effective teams create synergy, where the sum of the potential of two working together is greater than the sum of the two individuals working alone. In this case study you will learn about the benefits and challenges of working in teams. You will also discover how Microsoft supports effective teamwork through the software services and solutions it provides. Finally, you will have the opportunity to apply this knowledge by completing an assignment to plan the launch of a new product for Microsoft.

MICROSOFT CORPORATION

Microsoft is the world’s leading software development company. Its corporate mission is to “enable people and businesses around the world to realise their full potential”. Microsoft maintains a significant presence in Ireland through its European Operations Centre (EOC), European Product Development Centre (EPDC) and Sales & Marketing division in Dublin. The Irish Organisation manages the manufacturing, distribution and sales of Microsoft products to 41 European, African and Middle Eastern countries. One of the most successful of these products is Microsoft Office 2003, which was first introduced to the Irish market in October 2003.

MICROSOFT OFFICE 2003

Microsoft Office 2003 is a software suite that provides useful applications such as the word-processor - Microsoft Word, the spreadsheet program - Microsoft Excel, a leading email application - Outlook and a presentation graphics program - PowerPoint. In this sense, Microsoft Office can be referred to as a “Personal Productivity” Tool. It helps people to plan and complete their work, stay in touch and make decisions much more quickly and efficiently. Recently, Microsoft has concentrated on enhancing Office, so as to support teamwork more effectively. One example of this can be seen in the development of Microsoft Project.

MICROSOFT PROJECT 2003

Microsoft Project 2003 is a Project Portfolio Management (PPM) system. PPMs are used in business to assist the control and management of large projects. A project is an assignment that is planned, implemented and controlled by a group of people who are constrained by scarce resources and budgets. For projects where there are few people involved and a short timeframe, a PPM system may not be needed. However, many projects involve scores of people from different companies that can take months or even years to complete. Management of such complex activities would be extremely difficult without PPM systems such as Microsoft Project.

The key benefit of Microsoft Project is that it allows all the people and resources involved to be monitored throughout the Project Lifecycle. The Project Lifecycle is a way of describing the development of a plan from conception to completion. The lifecycle typically consists of four steps and has the following documentation associated with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Step</th>
<th>Project Documentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Conception</td>
<td>Project Brief: This outlines the background, objectives, key tasks, timeframe, benefits, costs and risks of a project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Design</td>
<td>Project Plan: This details each step in the project, when it will be done, how long it will take and who will do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Implementation</td>
<td>Communications Plan: This outlines how all team members will be kept up-to-date as the project progresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Completion</td>
<td>Project Signoff: The report allows senior management to review the project’s conclusions and signoff goals achieved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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GANTT CHARTS

Microsoft Project also provides a graphical means for monitoring progress through the lifecycle. For example, a project plan can be displayed as a Gantt Chart. A Gantt chart is an illustration that allows project managers to see the connections between tasks and how these tasks are proceeding. A Gantt Chart can also be used to highlight significant project milestones. A milestone is an event that marks substantial progress in the lifecycle. For example, in a product launch, a significant milestone would be the completion of production.

Figure 1. An example of a Gantt Chart from Microsoft Project

Project documentation should always adhere to the following standard principles of business report writing:

- **Accuracy**: If estimates are made, these should be clearly identified. The document must communicate facts.
- **Brevity**: The report should not be longer than absolutely necessary.
- **Clarity**: The language used should not be open to misinterpretation.
- **Courtesy**: The document layout should be simple and easy to follow.

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www.business2000.ie
Mistaken goals
Lack of Appreciation

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Norming
4. Performing
5. Transferring/Mourning

STAGE ONE: FORMING

Forming occurs when a group comes together for the first time. Introductions are made and the team's goal is clarified. Roles and responsibilities are distributed at this time. Some of the usual roles in a team include Team Leader and Facilitator.

The team leader is the person responsible for ensuring the objective is fulfilled. A leader should be fair, supportive, and recognized as a person who can make final decisions. The facilitator assists the team leader. The facilitator must be a good communicator and organizer. They are normally responsible for taking minutes at meetings and ensuring all participants respect the team ground rules that have been created.

Ground rules are a set of guidelines by which a team agrees to act. For example, common ground rules for team meetings include not interrupting when someone is speaking and respecting the right of everyone to express their opinions. Ground rules are very helpful for helping people of different backgrounds to work together and communicate effectively.

STAGE TWO: STORMING

Stage two is critical to the team building process. Misunderstandings can occur for several reasons. For example:

- **Misstaken goals**: Team members may have different perspectives on the project objective because of their distinct backgrounds. This often occurs in cross-functional teams. A cross-functional team is one that involves people from many departments, e.g., engineering, marketing, finance, human resources, etc.
- **Different Jargon**: Some team members may not understand the language used by others. For example, engineers and accountants can sometimes use very specialist terms. This can lead to confusion and frustration.
- **Lack of Appreciation**: Some team members may feel that their contribution is not being recognized or valued. This can lead to open conflict if not resolved.

While storming is a natural step in the team building process, it is important to resolve any difficulties that arise in a professional manner. A process of communication called feedback is useful in this regard. Feedback is a means of giving constructive advice to other team members in a non-threatening way. Everyone on a project team should be encouraged to ask for and receive feedback on a regular basis. If feedback is to be successful, it is important that it is done in a courteous manner. For example, a team member should never give feedback in the following circumstances:

- The time or place is inappropriate, e.g., in front of other team members.
- They are not concerned with the other person's reaction or feelings.
- They have ulterior motives, e.g., they wish to undermine the other person.

Ideally, feedback should always start with a positive statement, before describing how the other person's actions have caused concern or conflict. Feedback should always end with a suggestion for resolving the problem. The language used in the following example demonstrates how conflict can be settled in a constructive manner through feedback:

“Susan, do you have moment? I have read the project plan you wrote for the product launch. I think it is well written and has an excellent chance of being accepted by the board. However, in the ‘Risks’ section where you say ‘the Operations Department may delay the target date,’ I feel you underestimate our willingness to reorganise our schedule. What do you think? Perhaps we can discuss it and agree a revised wording?”

When teams generate ideas together to problem solve this is called brainstorming. Ideas should flow freely and each team member should be encouraged to put forth his or her ideas without criticism. The expertise of the team members can be used to identify the best solution for a problem.

STAGE THREE: NORMING

At this stage, team members know each other well. They also have a better understanding of their shared goal. Norming describes a situation when the team is in agreement about how they should behave and how the project should be managed. This stage may sometimes result in changes to ground rules, roles, and responsibilities.

STAGE FOUR: PERFORMING

Performing is the stage that all teams want to get to as quickly as possible. Performing means things are starting to work and results are being achieved. Once a team reaches this stage, it is common for the team leader to identify a short-term objective for the group called a ‘Quick-Win’. This is an achievement that can be celebrated by the group as a step towards the overall objective. A quick-win is an excellent mechanism for reinforcing team building and setting a positive tone for future work. For example, in a product launch, a quick-win might be agreement by the team on packaging design.

STAGE FIVE: TRANSFORMING/MOURNING

Once the project goal has been achieved, the team either takes on a new role (transforms) or is disbanded. If the team is successful, it is common for team members to feel a sense of loss at the winding-up of the group. This is why this stage is sometimes referred to as ‘mourning’.

Microsoft Project Team Building Game

Divide the class into teams of four. Each team member is assigned the role of Finance Manager, Operations Manager, Marketing Manager, or Human Resource Manager.

The launch of a new Student & Teacher Edition of Office will take place in 20 weeks time. You are part of a team responsible for the production of the television advertisements to promote the new software. Complete the project plan for 20 weeks to schedule the different tasks.

Each team member is given instructions as follows:

**Finance Manager**

You are responsible for getting funding for the advertisements. From previous experience you know that funding for the advertisements will take six weeks to research and write. The Human Resource Manager will find the writer to write the advertisements.

You need to contact five businesses that you know may have funding for the advertisements. If you can make appointments with them and convince the business person that the advertisements will be a success, you will get funding. The business person may not be impressed with your proposal, but you must remember that you only get one chance to get the money. You must make sure you get it right first-time.

**Marketing Manager**

You are responsible for getting the advertisements written. From previous experience you know that the advertisements will take six weeks to write. You need to approach five businesses that you know are interested in the project. Contact them and find out if they are interested in writing the advertisements. If you can convince them, you will get the advertisements written.

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**Operations Manager**

You are responsible for hiring a writer to create the advertisements. From previous experience you know that it will take four weeks to hire a writer. You are not busy at the moment and find the idea of working on this project very exciting. You want to get started as soon as possible so you need to put pressure on the Finance Manager to get the funding at once. Yes, however, you can only apply for funding if you know that the writer will be paid in full before you apply for funding. You must make sure you get it right first-time.

**Human Resource Manager**

You are responsible for hiring a writer to create the advertisements. From previous experience you know that it will take four weeks to hire a writer. You need to get in touch with five writers. You must remember that you only get one chance to get the writer. You must make sure you get it right first-time.

The objectives are to complete the project plan by mapping out the steps you will need to take to do your tasks. However, you must cooperate and share your information andlisten carefully to the information from the other team members so that they also complete their tasks on time.

(An alternative version of this team building game can be found in the Tasks & Activities page at the back of the pack.)