PROJECT MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Before coming into the question of what a project is and when one should use project work, the importance of having a skilful project manager and a good working project group one may reflect upon the reality and context that HR professionals in contemporary organisations are facing.

Human Resource Management is a strategic approach to the acquisition, development and motivation of people at work so that they can contribute effectively to the survival and development of an organisation whether it is private or public.
It is important to understand HRM´s strategic approach as compared with earlier forms of personnel management that tended to "live its own life" in the organisation and not related to the purpose and primary task of the organisation. Earlier on few personnel managers were involved in the development of organisational strategies and probably felt little commitment to them. At the same time, managers in the organisation often had difficulty in understanding the role of personnel managers and were inclined to leave personnel issues to them or to view personnel issues as disturbances and interruptions to the working day.

The process of redefining the personnel role into one that is connected with the organisation´s purpose and is decentralised and "owned" by line managers at every level will be a very significant consequence of a more strategic HR function. This cultural shift where the execution of human resource practises becomes part of the day-to-day work and responsibilities of managers will increasingly give more space for HR professionals to take on a more **strategic role** aligning human resource management strategy and practises with the organisation´s operational goal. This entails more focus on issues related to organisational development, job design and evaluation, human resource planning and human resource policy development.
Secondly, the increasing importance of the **change agent** role has focus on organisational and operational changes that take place in the organisation. This role has to do with the assistance provided to managers to effectively manage the impact of change as well as support provided to employees themselves in dealing with their experiences of change. Thirdly, the HR function will still remain the **centre of administrative excellence** that demonstrates expert knowledge, experience and skills.

The urge to take a more integrated view of personnel management is a result of external and internal changes to the workplace. Examples of external forces that have an impact on organisational life are; globalisation, increased level of competition regarding resources (e.g. qualified people), technological changes and citizen demands on public service delivery.

The internal environment is affected by the changing external environment and will also require change in the work culture. Modern organisations need a flexible work force that can adapt to changing conditions. Traditional bureaucratic systems of planning and implementation are likely to result in responses that are too slow which cannot always carry the commitment of trained and motivated employees. Organisational structures also need to change to flat, decentralised structures that will allow both managers and employees to handle change more effectively. Managers become leaders more than controllers.

Various parts of the organisation also need to work together in a coherent way to avoid duplication of work and misuse of efforts. Project based structures produce flexible and integrated activities.

Performance orientation will also bea strong element where individual responsibility is discussed and agreed upon in a performance management structure. The organisation provides training and resources for the individual to achieve the objectives.

Projects are an important tool to implement various change activities and is a useful method for HR specialists. The following will pinpoint some issues that are important regarding project work.

WHAT IS A PROJECT?

Project work is a very common work mode and a traditional definition of a project is that it is a temporary effort to produce a unique service or product. According to this definition a project is:

- Done temporarily (during a defined time)
- Resources are allocated to implement a project
- Has a unique goal – what is developed is different and special in comparison with other similar products or services. This means that projects are not suitable for repetitive tasks
- A team is chosen to implement the task

A project is separated from the line organisation but the result of the project work will be implemented in the ordinary line organisation

WHEN SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO WORK IN A PROJECT?

A project can be initiated by the management team, e.g. when management want to introduce new working methods, a new structure etc. A project may also be initiated at lower levels in an organisation and one can say that all projects emanates from the need of solving a problem or a need to change something. A project is a work method with a strong focus on the goal and is appropriate when you want to shed light on a complicated issue, the task is totally new and there is uncertainty about how to handle it. The task also need involvement from several units and demands cooperation and need to be carried out in a definite period of time. The nature of the task is such that it needs broad and active participation.

The SMART concept could be used to define a project´s goal:

S = specific

M = measurable

A = achievable

R = Realistic

T = time-bound

If the SMART components are satisfactory you will have a good starting point for the project. It will also help later on when the project is going to be evaluated.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROJECTS

Various areas can use project work and if we assume that there is a need for change there is also a need for a project. The following examples give an idea of how multifaceted projects can be:

Research projects
Suchprojects are knowledge oriented and has no objective of bringing about change – at least not in the short run

Investigation projects
Aim at presenting proposals for change or investigating proposals for change or investigating the preconditions for certain proposed changes, e.g. organisation overhaul

Development projects
Involve developing new methods, new services. They are often run as experiments.

Construction projects
Involve constructing e.g. a new building, a bridge, a power station, etc

Implementation projects
Implementation of a change that has been decided upon

Evaluation projects
Aim at evaluating an on-going established organisation, an experiment or an implemented change 2-3 years after implementation

These different types of projects differ in their preconditions and the demands that are placed on the project. A research project is searching for new knowledge while a development project is future oriented – wants to find new ways of dealing with an issue. A construction project is operational – a new building project involves different experts and all experts have very defined responsibility.

PHASES IN A PROJECT
1. Pre-study
2. Setting up a project
- Terms of Reference
- Manning and Project organisation
- Planning
- Project Plan/Description
3. Project Implementation
4. Completion and report on project
5. Follow-up of the project and evaluation of results

1. Pre-study
During the pre-study you analyse the prerequisites and specify the assignment. The pre-study deals with producing the basis for a decision on whether the project is to be carried out or not. It is a way to guarantee the practicability of the project; to show if is it possible to implement the project in relation to available resources and in relation to the wishes of the project sponsor.

2. Setting up a project

a) Terms of reference. It is the client/sponsor who is responsible for contents of the terms of reference. The Terms of Reference should always be in writing because it serves a good starting point for the project´s continued planning and also contain a rough evaluation of the project´s budget and time limit. The Terms of Reference is an official document that the project can fall back on if there are any unclear issues regarding direction and scope. The project group also has a common platform as a basis for discussion. The Terms of Reference also give all stakeholders a brief about the project. The project manager should also have a discussion with the client regarding the Terms of Reference and any unclear issues should be discussed. In the Terms of Reference is also stated how the project should be reported. Sometimes theproject manager/project members need to write progress reports and a final report.

b) Manning of the project and project organisation.
When the Terms of Reference has been developed, it is time to man the project with members who have the appropriate knowledge and experience and also start the discussion how the project is going to be implemented. It must also be decided if the project needs a steering committee.

c) Planning involves all aspects of the project regarding activities, budget and time frame and what is realistic to achieve within the given resource allocation. The planning phase is a very crucial phase and a good planning work will be of help during implementation as there will always be things that happen in a project that you cannot anticipate beforehand. It is also of importance to assess potential risks that may arise in the project; internal as well as external.

d) The planning part should always end up in a **project plan/project description** where the client/sponsor can foresee all the steps that will be taken, activities that will be implemented as well as the time plan. The project plan then works as a guiding document in the process.

3. Project Implementation
When all the planning is finalised it is time to start the implementation of the project. The project manager has together with the project team decided on distribution of tasks and how involvement of the project members will be in the project.

4. Project Completion
When the project is finished, the project group need to report on results. This report can be done orally as well as compiled in a final report. Sometimes you both present the result orally to the client/sponsor as well as report writing.

5. Follow up and Evaluation
Some time after the project has been completed a follow up may be done to look at what results have been achieved. When there are bigger projects that have been going on for some time, a formal evaluation may take place a couple of years after the project was finalised.

THE PROJECT MANAGER
A project manager´s task is to lead and steer a project towards its goal. To be successful with the project manager task the project manager needs to be clear regarding the task, e.g. what mandate he/she has and what powers the project leader has; what room for manoeuvre the project manager has. These conditions need to be clarified with the project owner beforehand. The project manager should also be appointed early in the process.

When the project manager has been assigned a team or if he/she has chosen the members of the team, one very important task is to negotiate with team members´ line managers to secure that the project members´ proposed time in the project has each line manager´s approval. The project manager may need to negotiate with the line managers so each team member has sufficient time to take part in the project. This is very important as the project members have "two bosses", the line manager where the member is employed and is the one responsible for salaries etc and the project manager who offer the members interesting and challenging assignments. If the priorities are unclear e.g. about how much time the project member can spend in the project it may create loyalty problems.

One can say that the project manager role has two parts; one is project control where the project manager is dealing with time issues, resource allocation, risk assessment and evaluation and follow up. The other part of the project manager role is leadership and making things happen by influencing the project group and the environment.

A project manager is leading a team so he/she needs leadership abilities. A good project manager has also ability to cooperate with people both within the project group but also with people within the organisation as well as stakeholders outside the organisation. It is also of value if the project manager has some knowledge of research methods and has a creative mind. Many projects need to find new ways of dealing with problems/issues and a creative mind is an asset. The project manager also needs to be able to communicate with people within and outside the organisation so communication skills are vital.

The project manager can be chosen within the organisation or can be recruited from outside. Sometimes a consultant is assigned to take on the project manager role.

The project organisation is, as was pointed out earlier, a temporary organisation and this also applies to the project manager´s mandate as a leader. When the project is finished the organisation is disbanded.

THE PROJECT TEAM

The project members that have been chosen will take and be given different roles and from that perspective the project manager may have to work in different ways with motivation. All groups pass through different phases and in the development of these phases disagreements among team members may rise that indicates that the project manager task may also include conflict management. The relationship that develops between the project manager and the project team is influenced both how the leadership is executed but also what personalities there are in the team. A leadership role is not static and may develop over time. How the leadership develops is not just a question about the leader but also regarding the relationship between the leader and the members. Also the project members have responsibility for how a project develops and how the leadership in the project is formed.

When two or more individuals are interacting regularly we can talk about a group. The advantage of working in a group is that the group, as it has several individuals, has more knowledge and information than each member separately. From that perspective a group can come up with more angles to an issue and also become better at solving problems. A group develops during work a group identity including norms and values. If the group has a shared goal one usually talks about a team instead of a group.

A well functioning project team is the goal for all project managers. In very long projects resources and competencies may change during the project period. Sometime also the project manager is changed.

All project members also have their personal goals and interests that can also change over time. This means that the project team always have to be recreated and the project manager is responsible for a good process regarding this.

What is valuable in the beginning is to discuss in the project team about individuals´ personal goals to be able to determine if they coincide with the project´s goal. If the personal goals differ substantially from the project´s goals it may be necessary for the project manager to replace one member or change the member´s tasks and role in the project.

Another important issue in the project is to be aware of each others´ roles, authority and responsibility. Projects should be organised in a manner where roles, authority and responsibility are clear. If there are two persons who share responsibility it is important that the communication between the two works well. Otherwise one may have tasks that are not executed or the other extreme, both people are doing the same task. Such issues very often lead to un-necessary conflicts.

Cooperation in a project team depends upon who the members are and how well they know themselves and each other. Everybody participating in a project team needs knowledge not only regarding their area of expertise but also about cooperation and communication. They also need to enjoy working in a team

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