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Program and Project Performance

Some techniques your program/project team can do for <u>free</u> to improve the success of critical initiatives

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info@hgrp.co

hgrp.co

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Some techniques your program / project team can do for <u>free</u> to improve the success of critical initiatives

By Ira M. Hendon, President and CEO, Hendon Group, Inc.

If you are responsible for critical initiatives inside of your organization, the following tips may be useful for improving delivery performance. I have personally used and mentored others on these techniques and have found each can be performed at a very low cost (if not for free).

Common vision…Common agreement on dependencies

As unlikely as it sounds, in today's day and age there are still programs and projects that are months into the work effort and all of the work teams are not clear on roles, responsibilities, deliverables and their dependencies on each other.

This situation is not good and is a sure receipt for disaster (i.e. over budget, late, incomplete deliverables). For each assigned work package, teams need to be clear on what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, who needs it and who is responsible.

There are several techniques one can use to help communicate the vision and dependencies. Personally, I like visual images. As my parents use to tell me, a picture is worth a thousand words. Although a little extra work, graphical illustrations of the work breakdown, organizational breakdown structures and other tools, for a team, helps focus on team dependencies. This drives each team to understand what they require, produce and their impact on others. It is fundamental and it helps the teams quickly understand if there are holes in the plan that could cause significant delays or inability to produce the final deliverable.

Take care of the mole hills and the mountains will take care of themselves…

I have seen some project managers ignore small problems because they are in a fire fight on the big ones. Many times, the reason teams are dealing with big issues is because issues were ignored when they were small. Program and project issues are like Accounts Receivable, they get worst with age.

Program and project team members need to identify and solve issues quickly, no matter how small they seem to be at the time. Examples are, lack of agreement on architectures, team structure, target dates or staffing plans. The longer one waits to solve an issue, the more it will cost the program to resolve. Teach your teams to <u>address / fix issues early</u>. You will not be sorry.

Open and honest cross team communications – Straight talk…No matter how painful

Sometimes programs and projects suffer because the program or project team members are not open and honest with each other…or even worse, do not want to communicate bad news to the leadership team. This situation is unhealthy for the success of the program or project and must be addressed immediately. The team needs to "get comfortable" with giving each other the straight talk. This only happens when the team and team leadership are comfortable communicating with each other.

Several years ago, early in a client initiative, I had poor cross team communications on a very large, complex application development project. I solved the problem by having a "team building" break a couple of times a week. The break took both the team and technical leads, for each of the sub-project teams, to the Dairy Queen for 15 minutes so they could get to know each other. After they became comfortable talking to each other, I had no more issues with cross team communications and the communication of bad news was no longer an issue. We began to understand issues early and could solve quickly.

One last point, a safe environment must exist for straight talk with the program / project leadership, including sponsors. All must be able to receive and give the straight talk. Many programs and projects have suffered significant cost over runs or schedule delays because individuals do not want to hear (or cannot handle) bad news. Remember the mole hill discussion…straight talk is your first mole hill…

Share lessons learned throughout the program or project so you don't get stuck on pain…

Many programs and projects rely on heroics to complete the work effort. And it seems the older the team member, the more heroic they seem to be.

Heroics mean long hours, weekends and perhaps even all-nighters to solve an issue. Many programs and projects have had their share of team members pulling all-nighters to achieve milestones. You want to avoid burning out your team. Do not fall into the trap of thinking if you kill your team, you are a successful program or project manager. Your star team members will be reluctant to work with you in the future. And, as a leader, you run the risk of being viewed as "out of control" or "over your head" and not get the "leading edge" initiatives in the future.

One of your responsibilities as a program or project manager is to develop your team. The best way I have found to develop teams is to share lessons learned early and often. This should be viewed as a professional development activity for all team members.

One useful technique is to have a weekly review with your teams to share what they have achieved and what they have learned. You will be pleasantly surprised that both your most experience and youngest team members will have valuable lessons to share. Encouraging this exchange will help energize your teams and help foster a high performance team environment.

Use reconnaissance (RECON) teams to understand issues early…

Many programs and projects are technically or procedurally complex. This means that your teams can potentially get stuck and stall out if they do not know how to solve the problem.

One technique, to address this common challenge, is to create reconnaissance or, RECON teams. The concept is to deploy a team to "look ahead" at issues and identify workable solutions before the main team reaches the problem. I have used these teams to develop proof of concept solutions, preliminary architectures or process recommendations to solve a complex problem where the larger work team could potentially get stuck.

By the time the core teams get to the issue, your technical, or process leads have a pretty good idea on how to solve the problem (architect the solution) and eliminate idle core resource time. This approach has prevented several of my programs and projects from potentially running behind schedule.

Our organization would appreciate your feedback on this White Paper. If you were able to solve a program or project issue using any or all of these techniques, we would love to hear about your success. Send an e-mail, with your success story, to info@hendon-group.com.

If your team would like some assistance on some of the issues described in this White Paper or, other program / project issues, please do not hesitate to contact us.

About Hendon Group, Inc.

Hendon Group, Inc. is a minority owned, small business Professional Services organization and Think Tank that focuses on improving program and project operational effectiveness and delivering program / project results. The organization's leadership has over 30 years of experience in delivering results for critical and complex initiatives.

Hendon Group, Inc. leverages the Project Management Institute organization's (PMI®) Project Management

Book of Knowledge (PMBOK®), Malcolm Baldridge Quality Program Award Criteria of Performance Excellence, profession best practices and practical experience to deliver results.

To learn more about Hendon Group, Inc., send an e-mail to **info@hgrp.co** or call us at 1.847.245.8722 or, visit our website: **https://www.hgrp.co/**

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