PMWorldToday

Published in PM World Today - May 2008 (Vol. X, Issue V)

PM WORLD TODAY – PM TIPS & TECHNIQUES – MAY 2008

Transparent Project Management:
Giving your customers what they really want

By Myroslava Symonenko, Dimitry Korolkov and Oleg V. Fonarov

Building effective partnership is closely connected with one of the basic and well-known rules of business: you should *learn* what your clients really need (or help them determine their need) – and do your best to follow their interests and expectations when offering them corresponding products or services.

Of course, understanding your customers is of vital significance at the stage of pre-project negotiations. But aren't we often loosing this perspective once the deal gets to the implementation phase? The key requirements remain essentially the same: you should be able to listen to your vis-a-vis and really understand them, as well as to be open and responsive when you have already started co-operating.

Thus, the magic word of constructive communication between service provider and customer is TRANSPARENCY.

What are your customers may look for?

- Comprehensive and regular reports
- Feedback procedures
- Issue tracking tools
- A possibility to assess the general picture of project progress (on any stage of its realization)

But what if your partners are located in different countries or even other parts of the world? Or if you are to coordinate the project with participation of several distributed teams?

You surely can manage (most of) the issues with hours of weekly phone calls and frequent personal trips. Still, there are issues that require your and a customer's urgent attention and have to be seen or verified visually - and not just explained in words. Nowadays of course it is pretty easy to find a huge variety of both desktop and online software tools, which will assist you in building effective daily communications within projects of any scale. The most advanced among them represent not only classic project management systems, but rather interactive and multimedia-rich collaboration platforms.

--

So, what does transparency actually mean in terms of modern project management?

1. **Tasks setting and estimation**
   (a) Clear scope: correspondence to Company's skills and competencies
   (b) Structure: hierarchy and links
   (c) Timeline: fixed, realistic, but flexible – within evaluated amount of work hours (according to risk estimation)
2. **Completeness and wholeness**
   (a) The *complete* project management process includes post-project support and analysis – as well as updates or debugging, if necessary.
   (b) *Wholeness* means that the project has no "black holes"
   Avoid gathering all documents and data in a stressful manner on the stage of the final report (unfortunately it still often happens so in practice). In the perfect case scenario your communication program will save all the project communication for you, so that it is all documented on the spot and you can trace it easily.
3. **Visibility** of all project activities
   Meaning that for knowing what page you are on, a project manager should see and control the tasks progress as well as the group (or an individual participant) progress.
4. **Daily / weekly project reports** for each task
   Let's imagine the usual situation: you set the project plan, and defined the milestones and assigned the tasks within the project team. Now, you can wait for the interim reports.or ask about the progress every day. Or you can start using the system, where all project participants have to report their job every day, and where you can track the progress daily. The last option is the way to go.
   The issue of progress and efficiency tracking we emphasize as especially important for the project transparency.
5. **Efficiency and workload tracking** per each project participant
   Those help you determine if you need additional resources for each particular task, or if you could re-allocate some project participants to different tasks. Efficiency tracking also let's a manager see if project participants are on track with the tasks assigned, and if the project time-line is observed.

6. **No interruptions or gaps** in communication.
   Such internal shortcomings may lead to misunderstanding and wrong decisions in general project management – especially if you deal with several distributed teams. Continuous records guarantee that all project communication is well documented and properly processed. Moreover, the records should be stored in a way that enables easy access and fast searching. One of the latest trends – task-related voice recoding and storage, which allows you to keep track of all negotiations and working discussions.
7. **Overall and individual statistics**
   First of all a project (team) manager needs to be able to identify bottlenecks and breakthrough capabilities. Overall statistics shows you what parts of one or multiple projects require the most attention and thus helps you identify the reasons why they became your bottlenecks. Individual statistics lets a manager see each team participant's weak and strong sides, and thus plan the resources wisely.
8. **Openness**.
   It is the real result of all transparency-oriented measures. Frank and as a result cooperative project atmosphere could be named one of the key factors for effective and constructive team work. It makes real value for top-executives and managers in charge at the customer side.

Discussed components are of even greater significance in the case of big projects, where participation of several teams (and remote coordination of their work) is expected.

--

Thus, our final question would be: What can you do right now in order to improve your capacities in *transparent* management of large-scale distributed projects?

From our point of view, the **algorithm** is quite uncomplicated:

1. *Analyze the current situation* first – and identify key bottlenecks (for instance, disorder in documentation versions, dispersed data storage, “lost” messages, lack of instant communication tools, etc.). Best source of information is your customers and employees!
2. *Develop a strategy* of changes. In order to win the battle with disorder and too complicated procedures, you will definitely need a plan!
3. *Rely on professionals*. Hire or assign an expert – or even responsible team, depending on the scale of your activities.

4. *Do some research*. Take a look at what the market has to offer for your specific needs. There are both general project management tools and tailored specifically for IT (and other spheres) management tools available. Pay attention to the specific ones as they will already have the business logic suitable for your company.
5. *Make a "test-drive"* for selected solutions. Ask for the demos or tutorials to better understand the scope of the problems you will be solving with the particular management system.
6. *Adjust and deploy*. Even leading solutions available on the market have to be adjusted and integrated into specific business processes of your company. Some of them may require much less adjustments than the others – to find those follow previous two points (4, 5) carefully.
7. *Teach and train your staff*. Because if we speak about the efficiency of any innovation in your business – first of all it always means making *people know how to use it and do use it*!
8. *Be ready* to deal with more efficient performance! ;-)

--

Those general thoughts are meant to give you overview and *impulse* for the first steps. After having gained certain personal experience in this direction, you will be able to choose your *unique* set of tools and processes which will support transparent practices in your projects in the best possible way.

Of course, the overall concept of transparency in project management goes beyond the content of this article. The forthcoming publications will be dealing with deeper analysis of the mentioned approach and its practical applications.

PMWorldToday

Published in PM World Today - May 2008 (Vol. X, Issue V)

About the Authors:

Myroslava Symonenko

Author

Myroslava Symonenko, Brand Manager at Program-Ace LLC, is an experienced business analytics and marketing specialist, focused on international campaigns and cooperation projects. As brand-manager of AceRemoteProject she is responsible for development and promotion of new IT-tools targeted at PM professionals worldwide. You can send an e-mail for Myroslava to M.Symonenko [at] program-ace.com.

Dimitry Korokov

Author

Dimitry Korolkov, PR-Manager at Program-Ace LLC, is a public relations and branding professional with 8+ years of experience in IT-journalism, business communications and consulting. After graduation from Karazin National University in Kharkiv, Ukraine he worked for several media and advertising companies in Kyiv and Moscow. In 2007 he joined the team of Program-Ace. Dimitry can be contacted at +38 057 71 22 180 or d.korolkov [at] program-ace.com.

Oleg V. Fonarov

Author

Oleg Fonarov is the founder and the CEO of Program-Ace, an independent software house from Ukraine with 15 years of history on regional and global markets. His key areas of expertise include R&D investments, strategic partnerships and visionary IT-development projects. More information about Oleg could be found on his public profile at http://www.linkedin.com/in/programace.

For more information, www.program-ace.com or www.AceRemoteProject.com. The authors can also be reached at info [at] aceremoteproject.com.