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Managing People - The Difficult Side of Project Management in Ethiopia

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You may have a well developed project charter, readily available financial resources, easy going project sponsor, understanding customer, weak competents, huge market access, but if you don't have an effective and efficient project team, the delivery of your product on time, within budget, and on quality will only be an idea on paper.

Human beings are not like machines; you cannot programme and re-programme them as per your wish for them to deliver what you need them to. Rather, they have their own biological, psychological, economic, social and cultural characteristics making each of them unique in their own way. Hence, some sort of re-shaping, re-structuring, re-orienting, re-minding of project team members will be required from the project manager so that team members can work together for the successful achievement of the project. Nay, this is easier talked than done.

In reality, the social whole in which an individual was brought up will have its own influence on the general characteristics of an individual. Yet, these individual characteristics will definitely have an either positive or negative impact on the project activities in which he or she partakes, and on the general project environment.

Being an Ethiopian has, as every other nationality does, its own identifying characteristics. More or less, an Ethiopian can be identified by his/her strong belief in God, optimistic view for tomorrow, love and respect for his manager, joy in working together, hard work, a bit conservative attitude, little attention to the details, strong attachment with past experience, and higher value to privacy.

Besides, it is a kind of normal, for an Ethiopian, to pass temporal deadlines. You shall not be surprised if you have got an appointment with an Ethiopian friend, and he arrives 20 or 25 minutes late. Because being late is not taken as so awful as failing to appear. You can also observe this in professional areas.

If you are, then, managing a project team consisting entirely of Ethiopians, or have (an) Ethiopian member(s), you should understand the fundamental socio-cultural rhythms of their lives. It will definitely be a challenge to manage a team of professionals who might have grown thousands of kilometers apart, in distinctively different natural, social, economic, and cultural environs.

But as the proverb “ Nothing gets done till it gets done” goes, considering all the above things at the outset will reveal the probable problems early so that you will no longer worry about it.

A complete understanding of the members of your team at the outset will help design an appropriate team-building plan consisting of customized training, mentoring and coaching sessions. Besides, it will help to identify potential risks in this aspect of your project, and design a proper mitigation measure.

Generally, in all cases, managing the human side of a project will remain the difficult side of project management.

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