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Strategies for change management by Maria Getchell

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Finding a good project manager is very important. Fortunately, there is a standards body called the Project Management Institute, which provides excellent guidance around the role and function of a project manager. Some will disagree, but I don't care if your project manager is PMI certified or not. You need to care about having a project manager with the skill to carry out the role

Finding a Project Manager

Do you need a certified Project Management Professional (PMP)? As I said above, I don't care. There are newly certified PMP's who have taken their tests and gotten the certification, but they may not be battle tested. There are veteran project managers who never got the fancy title, but they know how to manage projects. And there is everything in between. The track record is what you need to care about.

Do you have a strong PM on your team now? Is that person well respected, perhaps a key opinion leader in your organization? Do they treat project management as a profession? Then by all means use them.

If, on the other hand, project manager has been a title used by junior, untrained people who walk around with a task list and a clipboard, it's time to bring on stronger talent.

Your fastest route to a proven project manager will be a contract hire, either from a reputable firm or an independent. There are many good ones out there. Get and check references, and interview at least three. Let your key opinion leaders and managers interview them as well. Look for their track record and for good chemistry.

Set the Project Manager Up for Success

Simply put, everyone needs to understand that the project manager is your alter ego. Everyone includes you.

Your managers and project leaders must understand that they are accountable to the PM for providing all of their tasks, their dependencies on other tasks and other work units, their schedule commitments, and their resource requirements.

They need to understand that the PM will review all of their information and look for problems. These could include missed tasks, schedule inconsistencies, resource overloads, etc. Often managers will tell the PM that they can handle some of these problems, by working people longer hours or by overlapping some tasks "by a day or two." A good project manager is going to challenge such claims, and you'll need to stand behind the PM.

The PM is going to hold everyone accountable for milestone deliverables. In most projects, especially those that are complex, milestones are missed and contingency plans must be activated. Again, you as the leader need to support the PM as they hold people accountable.

Handling Conflicts

It's entirely possible that the PM will have conflicts with managers, team leads or others in the organization. Make it safe for people to discuss and bring up such conflicts. Just because the PM is

your alter ego doesn't make them right, any more than you are always right.

Engage your key opinion leaders along with the project manager and others. Find out the facts contributing to the conflict, and make the decisions necessary to get the change management strategy back on track.

Implementing changes usually is difficult because it is human tendency to resist change. A good project manager, and his project management skills will help you to smoothen the change management.

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