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# 5 SUCCESS FACTORS FOR GOOD PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

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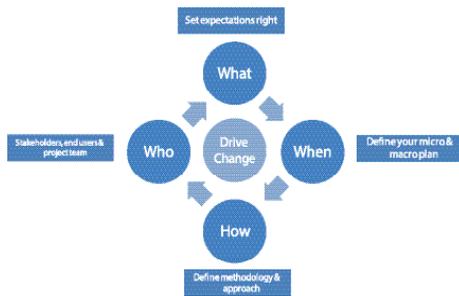
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The role of a Program Manager is more often than not, quite understated. A good program manager breathes through the myriads of the activities and lives the process day in and out: just as it takes a good director to get the most of his artistes, resources and reading the pulse of his audience in the making of a good film, it takes a good program manager to manage expectations and leverage his team the best to deliver a successful engagement.

Having successfully implemented multiple core banking and business transformation engagements of various sizes and kinds, and also having earned quite a few experiences along the way over the last 17 years, I have attempted to identify the 5 most critical success factors that are common in any well managed project in this article. These are not meant to be exhaustive - but certainly quintessential for any successful project. While the attempt is to focus around IT projects, these are quite generic and apply for any large transformational projects undertaken.



**DEFINE YOUR GOAL POST, SET EXPECTATIONS UPFRONT**

No journey can be completed in time unless the destination is defined upfront! While this seems an obvious piece of rhetoric, ironically it is for this reason why most projects fail. Too many stakeholders in a project can do no better than too many cooks of a broth, and if there is no common quantification of what is the ultimate objective to be achieved, even genuine successes go unrecognized.

**“GOOD MANAGEMENT IS ABOUT 90% PLANNING AND 10% EXECUTION. AS THEY SAY, IF YOU FAIL TO PLAN, YOU ARE PLANNING TO FAIL. A PLAN TO BE IMPLEMENTABLE HAS TO BE BOTH COMPREHENSIVE, AND COMPREHENSIBLE”**

Stakeholders need to have a common vision on what is being set out to be achieved, what are the benefits and why is such a project critical for the organization. Conclusion of one activity may mean commencement of another activity, and measurement of progress has to be holistic. Going live, for instance, in an IT project is only but a means of empowering business and not an end in itself. It's critical to draw this distinction way upfront and through the project.

**GET YOUR PLAN RIGHT: BOTH MACRO AND MICRO**

Good management is about 90% planning and 10% execution. As they say, if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail! While planning is so much of a common sense, where do things go wrong?

In most situations where a plan is said to exist, one sees the plan run into thousands of lines, but still the big-picture is missing. It's quite an arduous task for any steering committee to decipher what's going on, unless you have a one-page definition of the project. It is quite surprising, yet so true that projects get lost so much in the detail, that the woods almost invariably get missed for the trees.



**“SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS INVEST A FAIR DEGREE OF TIME AND EFFORT TO COMMUNICATE THE PROJECT BENEFITS TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS, AND HOW IT FAR OUTWEIGHS THE PAIN VALUE RELATED TO THE CHANGE IF ANY”**

The other extreme situation is also common, where planning stops at a ten thousand feet level, and the details of inter-dependencies, pre-requisites, and critical path impact are left undefined. The devil, as we all know, is in detail! A plan to be successfully implementable has to be both comprehensive, and comprehensible.

But planning does not stop at defining the activities and their timelines. The key milestones in the course of the project where the stakeholders needs to pause-reflect-validate if the progress is as per plan has to be well defined and the impact of an activity on another, should be well established.

**DETERMINE METHODOLOGY, RESOURCES AND PRE-REQUISITES**

Objectives and timelines are best achieved only when there is a perfect alignment to the methodology adopted and resources deployed. Defining the approach is both an art and a science - one has to draw a delicate balance between timeline and perfection.

Lets take an example. While we all know testing is a key activity in any core banking implementation project, what typically tends to get overlooked is the alignment of the timelines and quality guidelines with that of the methodology

& resources deployed. Each kind of testing has a different context - System integration tests, user acceptance tests, performance tests, operational acceptance tests and so on. The skill-set required, use of outsourced or specialized team, tools adopted, scope of test-bed, defect density tolerance levels, entry and exit criteria to measure efficacy - all of these go hand-in-hand with the timelines assigned for this activity. Unless a fine balance between perfection in quality assurance and adherence to project timelines is established, it's so easy to go lop-sided here!

Having clarity on methodology and resource requirements also helps link the pre-requisites of each activity to their availability and plan dynamically for any deviations as they happen. An alternative approach could quickly be adopted only if there is absolute clarity on what needs to be achieved, and by when. And that does help!

**COMMUNICATE TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS: RIGHT FREQUENCY AND RIGHT INFORMATION**

The simplest thing to do, and yet the most commonly missed activity in large projects is ensuring adequate communication. And it's still the easiest issue to fix!

In every transformational project, there are 3 kinds of stakeholders: Decision makers, end-users or consumers of the project, and the project team that executes. The project team also includes the larger community of vendors and service providers. The key to succeed is in ensuring all measure progress uniformly.

The disconnect begins when people in each group do not see the same picture as the other, or worse still, when people within each group are not in alignment. And that is quite likely to happen if the source of information is not the same,



**“EVERY TRANSFORMATION – BE IT BUSINESS OR TECHNOLOGY, BRINGS WITH IT AN ELEMENT OF CHANGE. THE DEGREE OF CHANGE MAY VARY, BUT THERE IS NO RUNNING AWAY FROM THE NEED TO MANAGE CHANGE”**

quite common when projects are large and multi-faceted.

The fix in these situations is quite simple. Firstly, keep the status update from a single source, and broadcast at a consistent frequency. Secondly, it has to be holistic so that all aspects of the project are covered, but still short and to the point, and refer to the same plan that everyone is looking at. Lastly, create and encourage multiple forums for people to communicate. The more you have a free format of communication driven with a common point of reference, the higher the degree of project comfort with stakeholders.

**EMBRACE CHANGE, AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES: BOTH SMALL & BIG**

Every transformation – be it business or technology, brings with it an element of change. The degree of change may vary, but there is no running away from the need to manage change. Even if everything about the project has gone well – in terms of its activities, timelines, deliverables and costs, if the change it comes along with is not welcome and not embraced willingly by stakeholders, the net result is a wasted expenditure.

Successful programs invest a fair degree of time and effort to communicate the project benefits to all stakeholders, and how it far outweighs the pain value

related to the change if any. Periodic and consistent celebration of project successes – at every key milestone – is key to drive home this message.

Of course, risks of various degrees – both internal and external – come to play in any large transformation, but the chances of managing them well is much higher, if one gets the above 5 key success factors right. At the end of the day, if you got the definition of what is to be done, when, how and by whom correctly, it would certainly be quite hard to get it wrong from there!

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