A Clarizen White Paper

Collaborative Project Management:

4 reasons doing it well will get you promoted

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Collaboration and Project Management

Like any other science - whether it's conducted in a rigorously-controlled laboratory setting, or a dynamic business environment - project management is not static. On the contrary, it's fluid and changing, because the people, processes and objectives that drive project management are constantly progressing and moving forward. And right now, one of the most meaningful and exciting directions that project management is rapidly heading towards is captured by one word: collaboration.

It's true that project management, by its very definition and nature, has always embraced elements of collaboration. As such, to imply that project managers have until now functioned in a kind of dictatorial vacuum, unaware and uninterested in the contributions of others, is both wrong and probably offensive. In light of this, it goes without saying that such an implication is NOT being made here. It's unarguable that project management and collaboration have existed together since this science was born.

However, acknowledging this doesn't mean that collaboration has always been exploited to its full business and performance advantages. Frankly, collaboration in project management has traditionally been seen as a “nice to have” instead of a “need to have.” It's been seen as something useful when it's there, but not fatal when it's not. As a result, it's not surprising to note that education for project managers has traditionally emphasized technical aspects such as scheduling, tracking and estimating – while leaving things like collaboration to be learned “on the job” (if at all). Of course, this is all about the past – times and trends have changes, and it's all for the better.

The Rise of Collaborative Project Management

Interestingly, the driving force behind the rise of collaborative project management has not been a unified plea from project managers who are clamouring for something better. Rather, the hero of this story has been that great saviour that has been responsible for rescuing countless industries, sectors and projects from brink of inefficiency, irrelevance and even extinction: technology.
Indeed, thanks to everything from cloud-based project management solutions, to state-of-the-art tablet and handheld devices, to the astonishing ease at which data and documents can be shared between team members in different locations, today’s project management tools and technologies are enabling a new era of collaboration and altering the business paradigm – for the better.

As a result of this advancement, today’s businesses are no longer asking themselves, “Why should we care about collaborative project management?” Instead, they’re saying, “How can we afford not to use collaborative project management to improve efficiencies, enhance our competitive advantage, and enable more successful projects?”

Benefits of Collaborative Project Management

The most fundamental of all collaborative project management benefits has been mentioned above; but it’s so valuable that it deserves repeating: collaborative project management allows skilled project team members to seamlessly and securely cross barriers of time and space; barriers that could not be overcome without technology. Now, project team members in Tel Aviv can collaborate with others in New York, London or Tokyo - or all of them at once - with the same convenience and ease as if they were all in the same room.

As impressive (and some might even say astonishing) as this is, there are other improvements in project management that are being ushered by a move towards more and better collaboration. These include:

- **Improving quality** as more team members play a role in the project’s ultimate success, instead of only those who happen to be physically “closest to the action.”
- **Improving communication** as more interaction – both formal and informal (i.e. “brainstorming”) -- between team members is captured, tracked and stored for easy reference.
- **Improving efficiency** as remote team members can literally work around the clock in different time zones, thus maximizing productivity and performance.
- **Reducing risks** as team members are kept “in the loop” can input or intervene at a moment’s notice to keep the project on track.
- **Reducing costs** as team members are consulted virtually vs. relocating them for the duration of the project.
Collaborative Project Management: Good for Organizations and Careers

Organizations that adopt the technology, training and tools necessary to make collaborative project management a reality will do more than see a surge in projects that are on schedule, on budget, and in scope. They’ll also see a welcome increase in the number of employees who are highly valued, and therefore, worthy of being promoted. Here are four reasons why:

1. **Collaborative project management develops communication skills** by encouraging effective, results-based interaction and problem solving with distributed team members.

2. **Collaborative project management develops leadership skills** through the integration of multiple viewpoints and perspectives into a unifying vision – and then by refining that vision on an ongoing basis to ensure project success.

3. **Collaborative project management develops management skills** by reinforcing the need to assign distributed team members specific roles, and then hold them accountable for performance.

4. **Collaborative project management develops technology skills** by utilizing technology-led tools and platforms to track communication, progress, resource allocation and all other project functions.

The bottom line is that collaborative project management isn't just good for organizations. Professionals who embrace this approach will find that it helps them develop highly valued skills, which is good for their careers, too.
Tips for Successful Collaborative Project Management

While technological tools such as cloud computing are enabling valuable – some might say remarkable – benefits, successful collaboration is not exclusively a technological challenge. It’s also a strategic, operational and personnel matter, as evidenced by these practical tips for achieving successful collaboration:

1. **Set the foundation and a set of basic rules, processes and protocols** that all distributed team members will follow. This not only makes tasks more efficient. It also positions both individuals and teams to succeed in their objectives, which is the ultimate goal of any project – collaborative or otherwise.

2. **Manage and monitor workload** to ensure that tasks, activities and responsibilities are effectively allocated. While this is important in any project, collaborative project management requires an even sharper focus on resource allocation and task assignment, both to prevent duplication/waste, but also to ensure that the right people are doing the most effective job.

3. **Make communication a key priority** to ensure that individuals and teams share information in an effective and consistent manner. This is particularly challenging with collaborative project management – and especially critical to achieve – because the quality and accuracy of information will essentially make or break a project’s success.

4. **Train team members on how to use technology** so that they can leverage it to make their work more efficient, and their contributing more impactful. It’s not enough to simply roll out cloud computing software, mobile technologies, social media apps, and other technology tools and assume that all team members know how to use them in order to improve their performance, and the project’s overall success.

Challenges Facing Collaborative Project Management

However, despite its clear value and benefits, there are nevertheless some key challenges facing collaborative project management; challenges which can prevent the aforementioned benefits from being fully realized. These challenges include:

- Over-emphasizing the technology, and under-valuing the process of project management.
- Ensuring that team members located remotely are aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- A reluctance among all team members – regardless of where they are geographically located – to share information.
- Cultural differences among team members, especially as those differences relate to individual and team-based work dynamics.

“These challenges highlight important tests that collaborative project management will face; tests that will be passed with the help of technology, tools and talent.”
Of course, these challenges do not forecast a difficult future for collaborative project management. Rather, they highlight important tests that it will face; tests that will be passed with the help of technology, tools and talent.

Focusing on the Future

Collaborative project management is a dynamic, progressive evolution of the science of project management. And what's more, we can clearly conclude that it's not a fad, it's not a craze, and it's not a whim that will disappear when something new and interesting comes along. It's the emerging present and the clear future of project management!