Choosing a Project Manager

Choosing the right person for a Project Manager role is crucial if you are to gain the benefits you seek. Those benefits are likely to include delivery of your project(s) in alignment with objectives (scope, time, cost, quality, stakeholders, benefits realisation, strategic fit etc.), team leadership and development, and possibly strengthening of project practices and processes. The right person for the role will have the required competence and will have a good cultural fit with the organisation.

Competence is commonly defined as Knowledge, Skills and Abilities. Knowledge needs to include an understanding of tools, techniques, and skills identified as good practice across a broad range of project environments. It may be important to consider specific technical and industry requirements, whether that be non-project management certifications and specific knowledge, experience and practices that are demonstrably beneficial for projects in your environment. Skills are assessed through a review of their track record of delivery, particularly within an environment comparable to the environment you're seeking to apply her or him and Abilities will include verbal and numeric reasoning, emotional and social

Qualities sought in project managers

Author

Stephen Harrison

Abstract

Explores important factors to consider when choosing a project management, particularly competence and cultural fit.

Keywords

Competency, project management, qualities of a PM

First Published

16 October 2014

Copyright

intelligence, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs.

The leading KSA (Knowledge, Skills and Abilities) for Australian and New Zealand industries (Ahsan, Ho & Khan, 2013), when recruiting (provided in advertising frequency order), include:

- Communication (reporting, presenting, relations management, and interpersonal skills) (62%)
- Technical skills (related to the technical area of the project) (44%)
- Stakeholder management (42%)
- Cost management (37%)
- Time management (33%)
- Educational background (29%)

The first five of these are Skills, the last from Knowledge. The leading Ability is Result-Oriented with 16% of recruitment advertisements identifying.

Cultural fit for the organisation. Key factors to consider include:

- leadership style (e.g. authoritarian, consultative, facilitative or delegative)

Harrison International Limited
PO Box 228
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Phone: +64 21 555-450
Email: coach@harrison.co.nz
Web Site: www.harrison.co.nz

- behavioural style (e.g. dominance, influence, steadiness, conscientiousness)
- conflict resolution style (e.g. competing, avoiding, collaborating, compromising, accommodating)
- personal purpose, values and motivations

These factors can greatly impact the Project Manager's ability to engage key stakeholders, manage the performance of project teams and suppliers and raise and resolve issues.

None of these items, can be taken for granted when bringing someone in to manage a project. Some of the more important cultural items may also be covert, not even recognised by the organisation but very real for a person coming into it. The fact that there may not be a cultural fit is not necessarily a problem in some areas. Perhaps a different approach is precisely what is required. Be aware that any differences between culture of the organisation and the culture of the project manager will manifest as rubbing and potential conflict, and will need to be adequately resolved for effective results. In my experience, it is often the organisation that struggles with the approach of the project manager more than the reverse, given the PM arrives with a mandate to create something at least a little different, and encounters rigidity from the establishment that holds inertia against change.

Once the initial selection has been made, many other factors need to be addressed such as compensation and benefits, working conditions etc. However, as a recruiting organisation clearly indicates to the market what they seek in a project manager, a better capacity for candidates to self-select exists, and recruitment against clear criteria assists organisational selection of their next PM.

Reference

Ahsan, K., Ho, M. & Khan, S. (2013). "Recruiting project managers: a comparative analysis of competencies and recruitment signals from job advertisements". *Project Management Journal*, October 2013, 44(5), 36-54.