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Central principles of project work

In the Demola project the group is carrying out a certain work in a project setting. Even when a project is creative work by its nature, many kinds of principles of professional project work and consultation projects are applied in its planning and execution. In this list the central ones are presented. These are generic principles for projectized assignments; not Demola specific. Reflect on them and adjust and apply them to your project as applicable.

Relation to the customer

- Note: Demola projects do not have a customer, but a partner. But in most other assignments there is a customer and you should understand that setting. That's why we write about it here.
- The project activity is service work.
- The customer is respected and is not spoken unfavourably of even behind the back.
- "The customer is a king and always right" – except when it might hurt itself with clearly wrong decisions. Then the customer must be warned about the risk.

Goals

- Shared goals are the most important matter of the project.
- Everyone must understand the goals in the same way.
- Visualisations help in understanding the goals.

Planning

- All kinds of work need some planning, at some level.
- Plans build confidence and shares information. What is self-evident to someone is not so to someone else.
- In the plans it is important to also describe what you do not intend to do, as others might consider something as expected.
- Plans are never realised as how they were originally made.
- Therefore they must be updated when or when the situations change or when the project moves from one stage to another. So, update the plans when necessary.
- When the project is planned, one should think what is important to the customer and their benefits and plan accordingly.

- When planning the project's ways of action, there usually is an already agreed upon way, which is described in a company's quality manual or other instructions. But in creative projects, the ways of action can of be chosen creatively – based on what is the best way to solve the present problem.
- In some cases there may be standards which are compulsory to fill. (Some process or method standards.)

A good project plan

- Follows a common structure.
- Goes to the point and is compact.
- Shares essential information.
- Is written with the readers in mind.
- Makes the project assessment possible.
- Tells also about open issues – perhaps someone can help with those?
- Has detailed plans as attachment as needed – such as quality plans, testing plans etc...
- Is updated when project advances!

Schedule

- Projects always have a beginning and an end.
- The things to be done must be fitted between them.
- If they do not fit, we need to reduce the things to do.
- This adaptation is examined during the whole project.

Risks

- There are always risks in all kinds of assignments.
- They must be identified and avoided or reduced.
- Some form of a risk analysis is needed for all projects and risks must be monitored during the project.
- The customer must be informed about them.

Who is the boss?

- The power relations are important in every activity.
- Inside the project, the project manager or the leader of the team is the one who has the last word.
- But he/she also has a boss.
- The customer or a steering group are responsible for accepting the decisions affecting the financial matters.

The boss does not boss people around

- Even in the projects the boss must not boss people around and base leading to giving orders.
- In Nordic management/leadership discussion, democracy and hearing the team members are essential.
- Things are planned in team's collaboration.
- It is the leader's task to make sure that the role and status of every team member is good and everyone is heard when making decisions and in everyday work.

Working team

- A good team needs good team spirit.
- Team building is the first step. Get people to know each other and their styles.
- Let people adjust their roles and understanding about the team.
- Make the team understand their shared goal.
- Form a pleasant atmosphere and environment.
- Maintaining team spirit and atmosphere is everyone's task. Each team member is responsible for it.

Financial matters

- The projects always have some kind of a budget because the human work always costs money.
- Therefore one must think about what kind of amount of work and acquisitions to can be afforded.



- The billed hours must be monitored. The customers often demand the very exact reporting of the working hours – and explanation about where those hours have been used.
- This holds true both in the private sector and for example in the EU projects.
- The project manager is responsible for working inside the budget. If the budget doesn't seem to be sufficient, it is discussed with customer. Then either the budget is increased or the things to do are reduced.

Confidentiality

- All the customer's matters will be confidential if it is not agreed otherwise.
- The whole project can be secret -- the things that are public are agreed in writing with the customer.

Communication

- Plenty of various kinds of communication are needed in a project.
- One must make sure that it reaches everyone.
- A good message is correctly timed and it is presented in a way that is understood by the receiver.
- In communication, information security must be remembered – for example, unprotected e-mail is not always acceptable, data storages must be secure.
- The document formats must be agreed on, so that everyone is able to open files and to use them.

E-mail practices

- Mark your email title with the project name.
- The people receiving your email have many projects and activities and they need to immediately see you context.
- Give a good title that tells what the message is about.
- Don't include many issues in one mail.
- Remember to Cc people who wish to follow things.
- Tags for importance can be used.

Meetings

- Structured, managed project meetings are a sign of professionalism.
- Meetings have an agenda, which is followed.
- A memo is made of decisions and of discussions, as needed.
- Send the memo to those who were not present! Think about what they need to know.
- Somebody leads the meeting, someone is a secretary.

- The meeting begins when agreed on and also ends when it has been agreed on.
- So, people need be present on time, not late.
- In the meetings, people do not browse the net, or read newspapers or type text messages.
- Participants dress up tidily, but dress code depends on the company and a person's status or role (in other words, for students it is more free) and on the branch where the company operated.
- Send invitations to meetings early so people can fit them in their schedule.
- Tell about the agenda and send materials with invitation.
- Send invitations by email – not in social media.

Monitoring

- The progress of a project is monitored all the time.
- Things to monitor include progress, problems, budget, quality, risks etc., ...
- Also people's motivation, team spirit, tiredness etc. ...
- The good leader looks at the matters with a sensitive eye, and does not only look into numbers in a monitoring system.

Quality

- In the projects it must always be clear what is essential for quality. What is important for customer? What needs to be done especially well? The central issues are followed along the trip.
- Testing does not improve quality – it only produces information about it.
- Thing need to be tested as early as possible, piece by piece, so there is sufficient time to fix things.
- Managing quality and doing testing require planning

Documentation

- Good documentation is useful for the customer. When writing documents, one needs to think: who need this information and for what? What information is essential?
- Good documents are a sign of professional skill.
- In different fields there are different documenting cultures – engineers in machine builder companies do things differently that the media companies.
- The project's final report can be very important, if the goal is to continue work based on it.

- It is important to archive everything that has been produced – analysis reports, test specifications, source code, original files of pictures, meeting memos (especially the ones with customer, but also the team's internal meeting memos).
- The documentation is often needed in auditing of project, where it is assessed whether the project has been executed properly.

Openness about problems

- The customer must always be told immediately about problems; otherwise the problems cumulate and get bigger.
- Acute, essential issues must not be left to be reported in weekly reports etc., but should be reported about immediately.

Schedules

- Keeping schedules is often the most important thing to the customer. They can have important deadlines the must meet.
- If the delays are coming, they must be informed about and agreed about as soon as possible. Slipping schedules can usually not be fixed – the slipping just gets worse.
- But! Imposing very tight schedules will not make the team any faster – they might make the team slower! It is better to adjust the amount of work to be more realistic...

Learning

- Every project is a learning experience.
- The learned things must be collected and must be thought about along the project but at the latest when the project ends. Those things could/should be written down when they are fresh in mind. Otherwise you may forget them.
- It is important to distribute the things learned to others so they can benefit from those too.
- The goal is to improve and to know how to make the next projects even better!

Reviews

- In a review meeting the team shows to all project stakeholders what they have done so far.
- Purpose is to make the project's progress visible, assess things done, and to get a shared view. If needed, big decisions related to the project's scope etc. can be done in the meeting.
- The project manager leads the review meeting and secretary writes down notes. Projector can be used to show documents, demos, product backlog, tasks, etc. In many projects there are reviews for the project plan, final report, and monthly mid-project reviews.