

EFFECTIVE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN SOFTWARE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Human Resource is the most important asset for any organization and it is the source of achieving competitive advantage. Managing human resources is very challenging as compared to managing technology or capital and for its effective management. The purpose of this paper is to identify the various people management skills needed for software industry, It includes various leadership skills such as Knowing Team Better, Creating a positive and Pleasant work environment, Communication with subordinates, Listening Skills, Appreciating and Motivating People, Effective Criticism, Avoid misuse of Power/Authority, Addressing the team and Personality Development. Indian software industry face crisis on retention and attrition strategies of talented workers. The effective people management will reduce the workforce attrition and enhance the job satisfaction of the employees working in software industry

Introduction

Effective people management means getting the most out of all your employees, helping them to perform at their best individually, collectively and in teams. The leadership skills of managers are the greatest source of employee fulfilment at work, according to research. The question is how far the managers have managerial skills? As the surveys show the managers/leads or whoever deals with people resources directly, lack in managerial skills and there is a need that they should improve their skills in people management. The present paper made an attempt to analyse the various soft skills needed for effective people management in software industry.

Need for Better People Management

Human Resource Management is the key to success in any project. A team can make or break the project. Low team morale is a hindrance to success in any project and it is the Manager's responsibility not only to ensure that the project is successful, but also see that the team is satisfied. Gallup Organization surveyed over a million employees and 80,000 managers and the results were published in a book called "First Break All The Rules". "People leave managers not companies," write the authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt

Coffman. "So much money has been thrown at the challenge of keeping good people - in the form of better pay, better perks and better training - when, in the end, turnover is mostly a manager issue." If you have a turnover problem, look first to your managers. Are they driving people away? As per the survey conducted by MyHiringClub, an Asia and Gulf/Middle East recruitment tendering platform, among 11,800 employees and 249 employers between May and June 2011, "Besides pay packages, career level growth and relationships with supervisors are the other reasons for higher job attrition," MyHiringClub.com Founder and CEO Rajesh Kumar has said.

Challenges in Software Industry

The software industry is with heterogeneous people. The field study was done in Chennai. In Chennai software companies we have people from various different states with different cultures. The working style of software industry is mostly a replication of western work style. But for most of the people the work style will be new to them when they enter in to software Industry because of the cultural differences. Even though English is not anyone's first language here but it plays a vital role in communication within the companies. In the mixed economy and for the people coming in different cultural background effective communication plays a vital role. The communication is the backbone of soft skills.

Effective People Management Skills

Dramatic changes are taking place in the field of technology leadership and practice. There is a growing awareness that the people management skills and project management are required competencies to compete in a technology world that is rapidly evolving, is trying to emerge from its recent economic downturn, and is being conducted on a global stage. Adding to this complexity is the trend for more and more work to be done under the rubric of project teams, often virtual and cross cultural in nature, consisting on independent frees agents brought together as needed for the completion of distinct pieces of work. Projects are always technical problems with significant human dimensions. As projects increase in complexity (virtual teams, involving cross cultural variables and the need to achieve more with less), increasing emphasis is being placed upon the need for the technical professional to develop competencies in specific, tangible "people skills." The research findings show that Managers/supervisors/Leads lack in the below skills which plays a vital role in employees satisfaction and has a direct impact on productivity. It is mandatory to the managers to concentrate on the below skills to improve the soft skills.

- Knowing Team Better
- Creating a positive and Pleasant work environment
- Communication with subordinates
- Listening Skills

- Appreciating and Motivating People
- Effective Criticism, Avoid misuse of Power/Authority
- Addressing the team
- Personality Development

Knowing Your Team Better

Knowing their people in work places leads to the success of the work environment.

A lead should be a good observer, he should not pre-judge. He should not let stereotypes or hearsay affect his observations.

Guess you bring a new person in to your project. Ask the team members to rate the new person and their comfort level with him. The rating may vary from 0 to 10. Now ask the stranger to give a self introduction and ask him to talk about his interests, career objectives, family etc... for 15 minutes. Now ask the same group of people to rate the stranger again. Now, definitely the rating would have gone high. The fact is most of the people label/ judge even before knowing the person.

Every person works for himself. He has an expectation. He works for his career. So it is important to understand his expectations, listen to him, observe him and give what he wants to get better results from him. We have to understand the human nature.

Take a group photo and give the copies to the individuals. At the very first instant, every person will be searching for himself in the photo and not the manager's photo or anybody else's. This is human nature. So, it is important to understand that everyone considers himself/herself alone important to them and not anyone else.

In IT industry, workplaces include people of different socio-economic backgrounds, diverse goals, various skill levels and opposite personalities. The software industry fully works on the knowledge base. It is the attitude of a person which plays an important role in delivering results no matter how skilled the person maybe. So, it is important not to undermine a person's dignity and respect the context which will be affecting their analysing skills, thoughts, attitude etc.

It is mandatory to know the complete professional profile of the resources you manage and recollect it when you interact with them. Try to have coffee breaks, dinner or a small outing with them to develop a better rapport with each and everyone in the team.

Creating a positive and Pleasant work Environment

People who manage resources should be calm and collected. Any manager's only intention would be to getting things done from resources. That means he is working for his career. But he should conceal his intentions. He should sell that he works for the project and the team. With that concept he should be able to create a good work environment But most of the managers fail to sell what they want creates like they only care for themselves.

Often we see salesmen selling books/CD's in bus stands of Chennai city. A salesman wants to sell a dictionary to a group of people who are standing in a bus-stop. If he approaches them showing the dictionary the mind set of the people will be to start preparing themselves to move away from him. If on the other hand, he keeps the dictionary concealed and approaches the prospective customer with a smile, then the customer might feel comfortable in the salesman's presence. Now the salesperson can make a small self-introduction and then tell about the product. Here we can see that the salesman creates a suitable environment before beginning his talk on the product, in this case, the dictionary.

We like to be around people who are positive and powerful people, isn't it?

Many animals are shrewd and fast in jungle. But why is the lion called the "King of the Jungle"? It is because of its roar.

If you want to be a leader you have to start acting like one. The lead should lead by example. The lead should have an optimistic tone. A manager should be confident when he talks to his team members. We like to be around people who make us feel good. So it is important for a manager to start his day on a pleasant and positive note.

Say, when you come to office, your team member talks about how bad his day is. This interaction doesn't usually improve your day! Instead, say your friend tells, Hey... the industry is doing well (or) Yesterday's cricket match was good (or) Dave's birthday is coming up, so, can we organise a treat etc., Such talk about good/pleasant things improves anybody's day and it will make the work environment better.

Communication with Subordinates

Show you care for them. Talk about them, ask about them.

You are back from weekend and you are meeting your team member. Instead of talking about your weekend, you can ask how his weekend was. Ask about his family. Hi Marcus, how was your vacation? Any interesting news? Hi Priya, how is your project going?

You don't have to expect or wait for anybody to open up a pleasant conversation for you. You can show people that you are a comfortable person and you can be a good conversationalist. Team members will always hesitate having a casual conversation with their superiors because of the hierarchy/reporting structure. So it is the manager's responsibility to open a fine conversation. You find a person distant and unfriendly or with a reserved attitude or is new to the team hesitant in opening up a casual conversation, greet him pleasantly every day. And whether he likes it or not he has to greet you back. Soon he will start liking you.

Listening Skills

In the survey, poor ratings were given on listening skills of supervisors/leads/managers. The responsiveness in addressing the team members' concerns was very poor. Managers should listen to the concerns of their subordinates patiently. When

a team member comes and shares his concerns or tries to give an update when you are preoccupied with your own activities impatience in listening undermines the dignity and attitude of the subordinate. Refusal to listen to people is just about the surest way of making them feel unimportant and of rating them as nobody. Listening to them is just about the best way of making them feel important. So, it is imperative that leads establish good eye contact during a conversation with team members.

Appreciating and Motivating People

When people feel appreciated, they are more productive, innovative and creative. While appreciating, appreciate the act, not the person and do it clearly. Instead of saying, "Peter, your idea in last meeting was good, keep a good work". "Peter, your idea on implementing the third part tool will reduce our burden. The tool which you have suggested is a proven tool. So, definitely it is a good idea to use it in our project. Always appreciate your team with the whole group present as it makes your statement public and recognized by others.

Effective Criticism, Avoid Misuse of Power/Authority

Research findings indicate that managers in a wide range of organizations and industries find the task of criticizing subordinates or giving them a negative feedback is one of the toughest tasks for them. Negative criticism should always be private. Only the concerned person should be able to listen and it should not go outside the doors. Otherwise the person will feel humiliated in front of others and it will psychologically prepare him to act against you in future. This will also reduce his self-prestige level, lower his motivation and self-set goals, and there will be simmering feelings of anger on being treated unfairly. Criticize only if you have a solution or if you are ready for a brain storming discussion. Before making a criticism make a self-evaluation on how far the act will help the person, team or process.

Any fool can criticize and most of the fools do - Benjamin Franklin

On being asked by Emperor Akbar, Birbal painted the emperor's portrait in six days. Akbar asked his other eight Navratnas to comment. Each one put a dot on the portrait wherever he felt it was not good. Akbar asked Birbal what he thought and he in turn called for eight blank canvases for his colleagues and asked them to do the portrait. No one come forward. Akbar, with drooping eyes, murmured, Dot-ers. MORAL: It is way easy to find fault in what others do, but difficult to do it yourself.

Criticism is like an injection for a cure. It should not be too long. Be specific and make it quick. Criticize the act, not the person.

Lee, we are not able to agree with you on your ideas - this looks like you are not able to agree with person.

Focus on the future and not the past. The objective of criticizing is to correct the mistakes, for better performance in future. If you continue focussing on what has happened in the past you are keep on hitting the basement and you are not building anything for the future. Punishing or giving a negative feedback or replacing a resource is not an appreciable act of a manager. If any person lacks in soft or technical skills it is also the managers role to make him improve and to make effective utilization of the resource. But most of the managers don't work on it.

Avoid threats, abuses to subordinates. It will be like digging your own grave-yard if you use threats while criticising, especially skilled people. Usually a threat will affect him psychologically, drive him to a corner and close his mind to positive improvement. He will plan to quit the team or company or to act against you.

A total of at least 44% of all Americans have reported that they have experienced abuse in the workplace. This figure was reported from a study completed by the "Employment Law Alliance". 80% of the bullied walk away and find another job. Well, the research conducted in Chennai software companies was even worse. 64% of employees reported abuse in workplace.

"If you want to test a man's character, give him power."

Everybody have an animal within them. It is only when the authority and power comes and they do not know how to use it in a positive way the animal comes out. When authority and power comes they do not know how to use it in a potential way. That is how Hitler, Stalin, pol pot, idi Amin were driven, isn't?

During the World War - 2, a German soldier daily activity was studied. A soldier would come to his home, play with his kids. He will bring flowers to his wife and help her in small work. He will have dinner with his whole family and take his parents to their bed and talk to them nicely. Then we will tell small stories and take his kids bed and say prayers with them. Then he will go to his private room and start peacefully his work. Starting cleaning his guns as he has to kill few Jews the next day. Researchers have to do lot of study towards the holocaust. One if the famous study was Milgram Obedience Experiment.

The Milgram Obedience Experiment

Stanley Milgram conducted what came to be known as the Milgram Obedience Experiment. In this experiment, perfectly normal people like you and me were assigned the roles of the teacher or the learner. They were separated with an opaque wall, but they could speak to each other. The teacher was given the task to teach the learner some words by asking him/her questions. If the learner responded incorrectly, the teacher would give the learner and electric shock that increased by 15 volts with every incorrect answer. Actually, the learner was replaced by an actor, and he'd not receive the shock but scream nevertheless. To make a long story short, the shocking outcome of the experiment was that

there were people who continued giving electrical shocks of up to “450 volts” to their “learner” even after the learner begged for mercy. Why?

Before the Stanley Milgram Experiment, experts thought that about 1-3 % of the subjects would not stop giving shocks. They thought that you’d have to be pathological or a psychopath to do so. Still, 65 % never stopped giving shocks. None stopped when the learner said he had heart-trouble. How could that be? We now believe that it has to do with our almost innate behavior that we should do as told, especially from authority persons. Any manager should be very careful on using his authority and power.

Addressing the team

Addressing the team skilfully needs lot of skills. Gaining a broader background allows you to speak with more authority. First the connection within the audience should be made. By knowing your audience, greeting and acknowledge and by maintaining good eye contact the connection with audience can be made. Have a positive outlook and be cheerful. Most people don’t want to hear negativity. They want to hear solutions. Even when you point out how bad their current situation is and how much they need your solution, don’t dwell on the negative. Emphasize the positive. Keep a cheerful outlook. When your prospects bring up objections or questions, answer in a spirit of cooperation and appreciation for their point of view. This approach puts you above the fray. At the end of your talk, you want your audience to feel encouraged and positive about what they heard. There is no need to tell the audience everything you know. No one can retain it all. For each major point you can give an example if required. If you are talking on any general issues you can illustrative with a story. A good story evokes emotion and offers a lesson. The audience members are then only a step away from their own story. Add humour whenever appropriate and possible. Keep audience interested throughout your entire presentation. Remember that an interesting speech makes time fly, but a boring speech is always too long to endure even if the presentation time is the same. Make few points and examples.

Personality Development

Organizations today recognize that the personality development of their employees plays an important part in maintaining relationships with their co-workers and subordinates which in turn leads to higher employee retention. It is a mandatory that a manager should have better interpersonal skills. Based on the results in surveys and feedback received by engineers we have illustrated with short stories the areas of improvement for managers.

Positive Attitude

Thoughts are very powerful. They affect your general attitude. The attitude you carry reflects on your appearance, too - unless, of course, you are a great actor. Your

attitude can also affect people around you. The type of attitude you carry depends on you. It can be either positive or negative.

A shoe company CEO asked its employee to study the demand for its product in one of the African country. The employee returned after a week and said there is no scope for the company there as the people do not wear shoes. So we do not have any market there. The CEO was not happy on that response and they sent a person. The second person came and said there is an enormous demand for the company as the people does not wear shoes. Soon the company started its promotional activities in the country and captured the market. What made the difference between the two employees? It's the attitude.

Values

People evaluate others with the values they have within themselves. Research findings indicate an authority or organizational hierarchy alone does not help in software industry to get things done. Values toward an individual, management and organization plays and important role towards the work commitment.

"Try not to become a success, but rather try to become a man of value" - Albert Einstein. Many years ago, a 10-year-old boy walked up to the counter of a soda shop and climbed onto a stool. He caught the eye of the waitress and asked, "How much is an ice cream sundae?" "Fifty cents," the waitress replied. The boy reached into his pockets, pulled out a handful of change, and began counting. The waitress frowned impatiently. After all, she had other customers to wait on. The boy squinted up at the waitress. "How much is a dish of plain ice cream?" he asked. The waitress sighed and rolled her eyes. "Thirty-five cents," she said with a note of irritation. Again, the boy counted his coins. At last, he said, "I'll have the plain ice cream, please." He put a quarter and two nickels on the counter. The waitress took the coins, brought the ice cream, and walked away. About ten minutes later, she returned and found the ice cream dish empty. The boy was gone. She picked up the empty dish—then swallowed hard. There on the counter, next to the wet spot where the dish had been, were two nickels and five pennies. The boy had had enough for a sundae, but he had ordered plain ice cream so he could leave her a tip. A person creating values for him in a group needs lot of ground work to be done.

Humility

Any great leaders are known for their humble and are with people and for the people. So people like simplicity. So leads/managers should not have any super ego. Success and humility goes hand in hand. Ego is our biggest enemy. In the survey, many comments were given by the engineers that their managers refuse move with them casually. Their language shows many times their authority. So obviously the engineers never feel their managers are part of them or show full involvement on their work.

A rider on horseback, many years ago, came upon a squad of soldiers who were trying to move a heavy piece of timber. A corporal stood by, giving lordly orders to "heave." But the piece of timber was a trifle too heavy for the squad.

"Why don't you help them?" asked the quiet man on the horse, addressing the corporal. The corporal replied, "Me? Why, I'm a corporal sir!"

Dismounting, the stranger carefully took his place with the soldiers. "Now, all together boys---heave!" he said. And the big piece of timber slid into place. The stranger mounted his horse and addressed the corporal. "The next time you have a piece of timber for your men to handle, corporal, send for the commander-in-chief." The horseman was George Washington.

If you are proud of your authority and position you have created an illusion around you which will hide you from the real world. In a team and in organizations constraints happen with people. If we remember those often we will never be able to build better relationships with team again. So a lead has to let it go and work for the future. He should show that he is more than average person. Create a character of forgiveness. Forget injuries, never forget kindnesses. Constraints happen with people. Forgive them or forget the past incidents. It's not easy, but we have to try. Reacting negatively may make you feel better to give him a hard time but it not going to improve the relationship. Always differences happen within the teams. Many may feel offended. A manager should be above this because he is a leader. He should not take the issues very personal. If he was affected by any words he has to let it go. Ordinary men think of revenge or retaliate; it takes great men to forgive.

During the American Civil War, a young man named Roswell McIntyre was drafted into the New York Cavalry. The war was not going well. Soldiers were needed so desperately that he was sent into battle with very little training. Roswell became frightened – he panicked and ran. He was later court-martialed and condemned to be shot for desertion.

McIntyre's mother appealed to President Lincoln. She pleaded that he was young and inexperienced and he needed a second chance. The generals, however, urged the president to enforce discipline. Exceptions, they asserted, would undermine the discipline of an already beleaguered army.

Lincoln thought and prayed. Then he wrote a famous statement. "I have observed," he said, "that it never does a boy much good to shoot him."

He wrote this letter in his own handwriting: "This letter will certify that Roswell McIntyre is to be readmitted into the New York Cavalry. When he serves out his required enlistment, he will be freed of any charges of desertion."

That faded letter, signed by the president, is on display in the Library of Congress.

Deal With People

Dealing with people is like looking for gold. It is no easy. If you want to win people you have to work towards it.

Andrew Carnegie, born in Scotland in 1835, Andrew Carnegie moved with his family to the United States as a teenager. He ended up in formation of United States Steel Corporation (USS), which had a market value of more than \$1 billion USD. At that time, USS was the highest valued company ever.

Someone asked Andrew how he dealt with people, He replied, “Dealing with people is like digging gold: When you go digging for an ounce of gold, you have to move tons of dirt to get an ounce of gold. But when you go digging, you don’t go looking for the dirt, you go looking for the gold.”

Conclusion

People management skills involve the abilities to communicate effectively on interpersonal levels, wear different leadership hats, apply a system that identifies individual differences, motivate individuals and teams, productively manage conflict, manage and mediate personal and professional stress, and become active in ongoing career management. Successful companies realize that true competitive advantage lies in their people. To improve the managerial skills of manager’s soft skill trainings and workshops should be made mandatory. Trainings should have been given in communication skills.

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