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Social Project Management or Project Management 2.0?

Project management topic is a hot topic nowadays. Why? Probably one of the reasons is that this part of the management science is undergoing significant changes due to the introduction of the new technologies for managing project teams. People are using blogs, wikis and collaboration planning tools to work on projects together. How do these tools influence contemporary project management? Do traditional project management practices need to be improved? To answer these questions let's take a look at the traditional way of executing project management.

Project management landscape is changing

Traditionally, a project manager is the major link in all project-related communications. This directly influences the efficiency of the team, as well as the manager's own productivity. He first has to pull facts out of employees through meetings and e-mails, then put them into a file and communicate the project plan to upper management and clients. The process is then repeated every time something changes. The project manager also needs to play the role of an alarm clock, reminding employees of their deadlines and overdue tasks. The whole process turns out to be time-consuming, and it results in a heavy burden for a project manager. The amount of routine work sometimes does not leave the manager time for leadership. That's why people began to rapidly adopt tools like wikis, blogs and collaboration planning tools and apply them to managing projects. These tools represent a significant opportunity for organizations to enhance social and Web-based collaboration and increase productivity.

The changes in project management brought by the Web 2.0 technologies are often called "Project management 2.0," an analogy with Andrew McAfee's term Enterprise 2.0. Another term used to describe the transformation in project management is "social project management." To find out which term describes the new trend better, let's investigate how the new wave in the project management discipline is different from ye olde fashioned waterfall methodology.

The change in project management has a social nature

Some of the distinctive features of the new trend are small teams, limited planning, minimal scope, small projects, rapid release, responsiveness and iterations. These features can be observed in a trend that easily took over the software industry - "agile project management." Agile project management is a different way of managing projects that helps to deliver projects much faster and at a lower cost. However, the core element of project management 2.0 is collaboration. That's why the other variant of the new trend name – "social project management " -- is so popular. "Social" is the main word here. Projects now tend to be managed with the help of the wisdom of the many. Collaboration brought in the form of collective intelligence is one of the two major principles driving the change in project management.

Collective intelligence is the capacity of human communities to evolve to higher order complexity and harmony, through differentiation, integration, competition and collaboration. In other words, it is a form of intelligence that emerges from the collaboration and

competition of many individuals. In project management, collective intelligence may be a collection of valuable knowledge and ideas from different fields that each project team member is an expert in. The new-generation technologies applied to project management make it possible to successfully collect and share this knowledge in a flexible, collaborative environment. This environment lets team members' ideas penetrate into project planning and influence managers' and corporate executives' view on the project. The project manager conducts the work and chooses the right direction for the project development, based on the information received from the individual team members.

Collective intelligence brought by wikis, blogs and collaboration planning tools can also have an outside effect, as companies gain more advantage from their communication with clients. Social project management or project management 2.0 is building new customer interactions and thus improving customer satisfaction. The project operations become more transparent to customers. Customers can easily follow the progress of a project on the Web. They can send their feedback, leaving comments in a project blog or accessing a project collaborative space and contributing to common tasks. Getting direct feedback from your clients makes it possible to quickly adjust your project strategy and tactics and change project development plans when necessary. This way, collective intelligence brought by the social project management software can help improve the quality of the products and services and make them fully satisfy the consumers' needs. Collaboration with customers helps to encourage the strongest community goodwill, and this goodwill, in turn, promotes significant marketing and sales gains. Thousands of companies are already reaping the rewards of their investment in external project collaboration. For example, companies like Microsoft, IBM, Google, Sun Microsystems and SAP write project blogs on a regular basis. The number of non-technology organizations that use the new-generation project management tools is rapidly growing, too. Among them are Procter & Gamble, Toyota, Ernst & Young, etc.

Thus, social project management also means involving society in collaboration. But collective intelligence is not the only factor causing the changes in project management. Obviously, the term social project management does not reflect the second key element of the project management evolution - emergent structures.

Collective intelligence is not the only factor influencing project management

Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions. In plain terms, it is a form of collective behavior, when parts of a system do together what they would not do by themselves. Therefore, emergent structures are the structures that appear as a result of multiple, relatively simple interactions of a number of individuals. The interactions are uncontrolled, but purposeful. This means that the software merges individual team members' interactions into the strategic plan for the whole organization. With the help of the second-generation project management software, managers and executives see through the organization and lead it in the right direction.

The social aspect plays a very important part in the new project management trend, but only together with emergent structures does it produce the greatest positive transformation effect. Together, these two powerful principles - collective intelligence and emergent

structures - make the social evolution of project management possible. The project manager's burden is shifted onto the new-generation technologies, as new tools let people collaborate and share information easily, building accurate project plans. This influences the role the manager plays in the project. He is becoming a project visionary, instead of a being a taskmaster. Collective intelligence and emergent structures brought by the new-generation project management software help managers and corporate executives to make businesses more adaptive to changes. Many respected analysts confirm that companies that leverage this software become more competitive, as they can react to changes faster and deliver successful projects in shorter periods of time.

So choosing between the two terms to describe the evolutionary change in project management, "project management 2.0" might be the better option, as this term reflects where both important factors - collective intelligence and emergent structures-- come from: Web 2.0 technologies.