

Projects - Keeping Your People in Mind



With Change Comes Risk.

With Risk Comes Pressure.

With Pressure Comes Stress

You need people who care for change projects to be a success and often it's the people that care who can break.

It is something of a given that big change projects come with complexities, deadlines, long hours, high expectations and to some extent that's what provides the challenge and perhaps attracts a certain type of person to get involved. My experience is that the best projects create a buzz and a team spirit that naturally leads to a certain level of mutual support from within the team itself. This can be every bit as effective as support from above.

I have been wondering to what degree that has been missed by those who work on projects - both for leaders and project members - through this work from home phase, and also what really counts in terms of supporting people working on the most challenging projects.

So the following questions are mostly aimed at the COOs, the CFOs, the partners and C-suites that sponsor big change projects, but they probably apply to many managers – ask yourselves :

- Who is shouldering the weight of the project? Is it on one person? Are they ok? Ask them twice! Keep asking as you approach any Big Bang project deadlines. By the way – if your answer is one person – that’s the wrong answer. See next question..
- Is your Steering group a trusted place where the group work as a team to check progress, make decisions, assess risks and remove blockers. Do they shoulder the weight? Do they act as a heat shield for the project team rather than add more heat?
- Can your project leaders share? Do you allow them to make mistakes? If there are issues, is the environment such that they can put them on the table without fear?
- Do you put limits on people in terms of what you let them give? They may be doing a great job but if you know they work crazy hours at what point will you stop them? Or is there no stop point?

Personally I have given my all for projects at times, and I have had my sleepless moments! Two of my projects have involved switching off the entire firms’ global Risk and Finance systems whilst the team worked 24/7 to get the new ones up. There was no fall back arrangement possible - the firm had no systemised business intake or cash until we pressed the ON button. That level of responsibility is not uncommon for such projects and although there are formal sign offs and Go/No go meetings it can still feel like ‘Its on you’. I survived and succeeded and I mostly look back fondly with a slightly rose tinted view.

But I had great colleagues, and I’m a bit of a sharer. The opportunity to pick up on someone struggling, to take them for a coffee or to the pub isn’t there in its usual form. So more thoughtfulness from above to take account of this for the current times especially please, but even in more normal times, factor this into your project world. Recognise what you ask of people.

Look after people, just because you should. Laurence, however, can tell you why it’s in your interest to care...



Karen has been talking about the people and the practical aspects of managing projects mindfully. It falls to me to talk about some of the more hardnosed economic benefits.

So, if humanity isn't enough for you, read on...

Goodwill. Having people's goodwill is a terrific asset. They are grateful you have been supportive and will remember it when it comes to times when they can help the business. They will carry that goodwill into the market to build your brand as a business and an employer of choice. They might, a particular risk with contract team members, also think twice about leaving your project at a critical time for that lucrative role elsewhere. I don't mean they won't take the offer, only that they might delay it a week or two to try and close down that particularly thorny piece of work that is on the critical path first.

Respect. They will respect your approach to management because they have seen that your approach has worked for them, and this will help them be supportive of decisions in future. Respect leads to trust and trust, as Simon Sinek tells us, empowers high performance.

Engagement. There is plenty of research on the benefits of employee engagement. Quality and efficiency are the ones I'll mention here. Harvard Business Review cites Gallop as indicating a 41% reduction in quality incidents from engaged employees. Gallop, again, in 2016 reported 17% higher efficiency.

Alertness. And by this, I mean the willingness to look beyond the task in hand. To take a view of the broader perspective. This is what gets your team coming back to you with suggestions for improvements rather than grinding through their daily tasks in isolation. If they see the project is misaligned, they will be encouraged to help you get it back on track. This may be even more important now that so much of our work is remote – losing some of

the liminal interactions people have when they are in the same office. While I'm on the letter "A" I recall I should also have mentioned absenteeism. Engagement (see above!) is believed to reduce absenteeism by 41% (Gallop 2016 again).

Teamwork. If your team members feel they are in a team that looks out for them, then they will be looking out for their team members. This extends all the way from looking out for colleagues under pressure through covering for colleagues who may be working more flexible hours to going that extra mile to make sure their colleagues hit their own project deadlines.

So, what does this mean in practice?

Big (and many small) projects are never going to be anything other than demanding for the people on them. There will be times with long hours, hard to meet deadlines, pressure and the challenges of things not going according to plan.

You still need to get your project done well and on schedule.

There will definitely be stress!

That makes it even more important to be conscious of the team.

Its delay and rework that are the drivers of inflationary project costs. The people on your project are the key to avoiding them. Investment in supporting those people in a mindful way is good for the individuals but the pay back for the business should also be significant. The value of hitting those deadlines when there is a complex framework of project dependencies, of staying alert for solutions to program issues and of creating a culture where team members are looking out for the success of the whole team, is material.

The Mindful Business Charter provides great guidance to help you work in an open, smart and respectful way. These are things that can be applied in program management as well as across your business as a whole. Critically, embracing this guidance should improve service quality and help drive value improvements that will enhance business success however you measure it.

So even if you're a hard-nosed program manager with a focus on the deadlines and the budget, running the project with your people in mind can help deliver a more efficient, more timely and less risky project.

Karen Conway

Laurence Milsted

Karen and Laurence are Directors of Legal Success Consulting.

Legal Success Consulting combine their finance, project, and tech skills to ensure that business benefits are at the heart of all project delivery. They champion a business-led approach to all

project phases, making the joins from the strategy to the detail, and have many years of delivery experience across the client matter lifecycle in global law firms.

References

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Simon Sinek

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Mindful Business Charter

[Mindful Business Charter](#)