PMI IS COP BOOK REVIEW

1 The Book

Book Title: The Virtual Edge: Embracing Technology for Distributed Project Team Success
Authors: Margery Mayer, PhD
Publisher: Crown Business
List Price (Amazon): $39.95
Format: Paperback
Publication Date: 2010
ISBN: 978-1-935589-09-9
PMI Bookshelf reference (url):
Reviewer: John Lee
Review Date: April 1, 2013

2 Review

The author provides a very concise explanation illustrated by actual case studies of how global teams can be more effective in communicating and working together to achieve set objectives. Quality leadership is how to build and motivate teams to deliver to expectations. Today’s global leaders must use technology to add to the team’s experience and bring value to the effort.

Background

Globalization has bridged the gaps between countries, economies and people. It provides businesses with more options within their own local markets as well as overseas. Most supply chain operations are global as the goods and services are provided through several parties and countries before reaching the end consumers. An example is offshore programming where software programmers in India provide the coding for an application developed in the USA for a customer. Often the best resources

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1 This book review was submitted by the Project Management Institute Information Systems Community of Practice (PMI IS CoP), republished here based on a cooperative program with the PM World Journal established in March 2013. For information about the PMI IS CoP, go to http://is.vc.pmi.org/, @ISCoPPMI, #iscopbookclub
for the job may be sitting in another country. This has extended the supply chain and created many opportunities to exploit the best talent available at the right cost. It has also created other problems as the global manager needs to manage across cultures.

There are many ways to achieve connectivity today. There are audio, video, asynchronous e-mail and synchronous chat calls. Communication gap tend to exists due to cultural differences, language, beliefs, social norms and work ethics. A worker in USA may work 50 hour weeks for 10-12 hours a day including working from home. A worker in France may not want to work a minute more than 8 hours a day. By understanding the cultural nuances, a global manager can calibrate the schedule according and set the right expectations with the stakeholders. Technology though essential cannot guarantee quality in communications. It is important for leaders to understand and develop communication plans that incorporate technologies and use best practices to disseminate information at the right timing to the right audience.

**Analysis**

A different skill set is needed to lead in the global environment. The constraint for the global team leader to understanding each team member’s behavior must be managed by better ways to predict and control these behaviors. The ability to think critically and analyze the situation will increase the likelihood of making quality decisions that increase successes in the situation on hand. Making the wrong decision can lead to adverse impact to cost, morale and goodwill or reputation of the company. Some of the ways to support critical thinking are to ask the right questions, seek clarifications, active listening, probing assumptions, look at multiple viewpoints and build on ideas of others.

The book also contains interviews with global leaders from a cross section of industries. These cases were organized into small, medium and large companies. Some of the findings are:

A commonality for small companies is that there are often no common networks and standards for working together between team members. Team members are dispersed in many locations and may use different computing platforms. Some of the ways that the project leader can improve communication are taking time to understand each other’s cultures to build trust, seeking collaborative technologies to use and setting shared common goals.

Most of medium size companies have their own corporate technology infrastructure which makes internal communications easier. They also have consistent resources internationally that they can rely on for their projects. The challenge for project leaders is to maintain the cohesiveness of their team and continue to deliver according to expectations. There are also challenges from time zone and cultural differences that may take time to resolve.
Large companies have centralized IT departments and set standards for technology (hardware/software). The business usually has a Headquarter in 1 location and multiple offices in many countries. The challenges are time zone differences and cultural norms within countries. Global leaders in large companies must have a communications plan in place to set the right expectations and for information sharing between the project leader and the stakeholders (business people, team members, suppliers). In order to play an active role in communicating the plan, the leader must develop tasks jointly with the team members. This will build trust and agreement on the goals, deliverables and due dates. Documentation is important to confirm the plan and avoid future misinterpretation.

Conclusion

Margery talks about how globalization is changing the way businesses operate. Physical boundaries are no longer the constraint due to rapid growth of the computer and internet technologies. Global supply chain makes companies and countries interdependent as the resources and goods are delivered and consumed across borders.

What this means for global leaders are that virtual teams are also spread out across countries. Virtual teams are becoming more of a norm in this globalized age.

Technology is a key factor for collaboration in the virtual teams. Choosing the right tool is important as it increases productivity for the team.

There are certain traits that a global leader must have to be successful. Leading a global team requires an understanding of team dynamics, clear communications techniques and the desire to lead. A global leader must set the vision and strategic direction which must be communicated to the team. Other key actions include encouraging critical thinking, brainstorming, obtaining feedback and organizing online sessions using the selected collaborative technologies. A global leader’s success is also heavily dependent on creating a culture of trust between team members and with the leader. This means delivering on commitments and providing the right level of motivation.

The suggestions and case examples shared by Margery in her book are skills that can be adapted by anyone who has global leadership responsibilities.
3 Quotes to be shared with the community

1. Technology allows for communication but the bigger issue is clear communications.

2. Leadership is about coping with changes in today’s competitive and stressful economy, more change demands more leadership (Kotter, 1999)

3. Employee productivity increases by up to 36 % as a result of collaboration. Collaborative tools reduce the costs and associated time in travel and increase the opportunity to work outside of the immediate locale (Frost & Sullivan, 2006).

4. Sharing corporate values and conforming to local customs are critical factors for successfully leading a global team (Paradise, 2008)

4 Score of the book

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<td>The Virtual Edge</td>
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<td><strong>Executive Summary:</strong></td>
<td>The Virtual Edge addresses the challenges faced by organizations in today’s global economy. Globalization has provided the opportunity for businesses to transcend the physical geographical boundaries as organizations can engage more readily with each other. Organizations have to operate across different physical locations, deal with rapid changes in the world economy, stiffer global competition, shorter product life cycle, higher complexity (culture, processes) and time zones. This book gives an insight on how businesses can address these challenges by using technology to gain an edge in the business arena. It highlights the essential characteristics of virtual teams and provides numerous case studies of how virtual project teams can work together by effectively leveraging the electronic information infrastructure to overcome the problems global teams may face.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author:</strong></td>
<td>Margery Mayer</td>
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<td><strong>Name of the source:</strong></td>
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The Reviewer

John Lee, PMP, MBA, CISA, CISM, CISSP

John Lee has over 15 years of experiences as a senior manager in the IT and business consultancy industry using technology as an enabler to support and implement the business strategies of the companies he has worked with. He has been involved in project management, process management, demand management, resource planning and managing an operational unit providing IT services.

He was the Regional CIO for a multinational organization in the Asia Pacific area. He is now working with the Global Project Office to implement strategic business projects leveraging on the use IT to add value to the process. His recent achievements include the development of an internal project model for a business unit of a global company. His credentials and knowledge areas covers Project Management, IT security procedures, financial systems and sales distribution processes.

He is a believer of risk management in projects as it is important to be “aware” of the challenges that can affect its deliverables. Good project management skills supported by appropriate risk management processes increases the rate of successful project outcomes. john-lee@live.com.sg
Editor’s note: This book review was the result of cooperation between PM World and the Project Management Institute (PMI) Information Systems (IS) Community of Practice (CoP) (PMI IS CoP – http://is.vc.pmi.org/). The PMI IS CoP has established a members-based project management book club as a service to members who can receive PDUs for PMP recertification for authoring the reviews. Each book is reviewed and scored according to established criteria. The top scoring book reviews will be published in the PM World Journal. If you are a PMI member and in the IS, IT or other technology-related field, consider joining the PMI IS CoP and participating in this unique book review program. Information at http://is.vc.pmi.org/ or @ISCoPPMI, #iscopbookclub.