UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
Computer Science

UFSC   Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Christiane Gresse Von Wangenheim, PMP

Leadership exercise: Dealing with difficult people

Purpose

The purpose of the exercise "Dealing with difficult people" is intended to illustrate difficulties related to leadership in project management. During this activity, groups of learners realize a project kick-off meeting. One of the group members represents the project manager, who has to lead the meeting and in the end receive the signatures of all group members representing their commitment. Each of the other group members is instructed to "act" as a specific personality (for example, a whiner, no-person etc. (Brinkmann & Kirschner, 1994)). In order to successfully finish the kick-off meeting, the project manager has to react adequately to each of the specific behaviors, in which case, the respective group member changes into a cooperative, positive person and agrees to the proposed project plan.

Goals and objectives

Goal

The goal of the activity is to principally to illustrate leadership difficulties typically encountered in practice. On the cognitive level, the learning objective of the activity is to reinforce human resource management concepts on the cognitive levels of remembering, understanding and application in accordance to the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). On the affective level, the exercises contributed to learning to receive and respond to phenomena.

Objectives

After the session, participants will be more aware and attentive in dealing with personalities as part of leading the execution of a project.

Primary target audience

The activity is intended to be used as part of project management courses principally in an university environment targeted to teach project management students. A pre-requisite for the application of the activity is that the participants have a basic understanding of project management and human resource management taught, e.g., through lectures.

Group size

Groups are composed of at least 5 participants and with a maximum of 8 participants. Each member of the groups assumes a specific role, including:
- Project manager (1 participant): responsible for leading the meeting and obtaining the commitment of all group members.
- Other group members (4 -7 participants): to "act" as instructed and change into a cooperative, positive person, when the project manager responds adequately to their behavior.

Duration

Phase	Time
Explanation of the activity	5 min
Execution of the meeting	15 min

Debriefing	5 min
TOTAL	25 min

Physical setting

Room size depends on the number of groups providing sufficient space for each group for the realization of the meeting. At least on desk/table should be available for each group.

Materials and equipment

Cards with instruction for the behavior of the group members (one set per group).
Card with simplified project plan (one per group).

Process

Phase	Description
Explanation of the activity	The facilitator presents a list of complicated personalities, illustrating their behavior and showing adequate responses. Then, the facilitator explains the activity.
Realization of kick-off meeting	Each group selects one member as a project manager. The project manager receives a card with a simplified project plan as a basis for the realization of the project kick-off meeting. Each of the other project members receives a card instructing which personality type s/he should represent. The project manager starts the meeting and tries to obtain the commitment of all members. The members participate in the meeting "acting" as the personalities they represent. The project manager has to respond to the presented behaviors. When the project manager's reaction is considered adequate with respect to a specific behavior, the respective member changes into a cooperative and positive participant of the meeting and demonstrates his/her commitment by signing the project plan.
Debriefing	In discussion with all participants, the groups reflect and report on what happened during the meetings and identify strengths and weaknesses involved in leading such complicate personalities. The participants also reflect on what they learned in this activity and how they can apply this in their daily work routine.

Debriefing main points

The debriefing is directed to reflect on the importance of leadership skills, including discussion questions, such as: How did you deal with this type of personality? Did this successfully respond to this type of personality?
In a second part of the debriefing the objective is to briefly reflect on the activity as a learning opportunity, discussing questions, such as: What did you learn through this activity? How can you apply this in your daily work?

Full contact information:

Christiane Gresse von Wangenheim
gresse@gmail.com
Department of Computer Science - INE
Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC

88049-200 Florianópolis - SC
Brazil

References

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