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Relationship Management Model For Global It Industry.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship management techniques required to manage the IT projects for global customers. The customer behaviour, expectations, management, tracking and communication mechanisms have many similarities and differences when we compare between different cultures. Customers from United States of America, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Germany, Belgium and India are studied while working on this study.

The understanding and knowledge of the customer behaviour have an impact of managing the IT projects. A comparison of the differences in the cultural aspects and way of working results in different relationship management techniques for these customers.

The relationship management strategy has always helped in resolving uncertain events and help in better and quick resolutions of the issue. The relationship management techniques also help in growing the engagement level between the two organizations. This study investigates strategy for handling relationship management techniques to customer supplier relationship. There is a need to have effective relationship management processes & techniques for managing customer supplier relationship issues, in order to have successful delivery of IT projects.

Keywords :

Introduction

The nature of supplier and customer relationships becomes very important when considering IT services projects. Services Industry is based on development of mutual trust between the customer and supplier. Relation management is a journey, customer and supplier have to travel to achieve the strategic partnership develop trust and bring creativity/Innovation.

The path followed to achieve the strategic relationship, the usual commercial models followed and phases of relationship is defined in the chart at last.

Relationship Journey

I would like to divide the relationship Journey into three phases:-

1. Certainty:- During this phase the two organizations (Customer and Supplier) are working to know each other the steps taken are defined in the graph above
2. Trust: - During this phase the two organizations (Customer and Supplier) develop trust the initial issues are resolved and thoughts to grow the engagement is started
3. Creativity: - During this phase the two organizations (Customer and Supplier) are working on how to improve, bring creativity in the way they are working.

Objectives of the Research

The key objectives of this study are:

- Identify effective relationship management processes & best practices for managing customer supplier relationship

issues, in order to have successful delivery of IT projects and services.

- Identify ways of growing partnership and mutual benefits, using relationship management
- Identify techniques to mitigate risks using relationship management

Secondary objectives of this study which can be used for future research work can be:-

- Aligning organisations objectives with relationship management.

This research has the primary aim of investigating project risk management issues that relate to relationship issues between customers and suppliers. The intention is to investigate effective relationship management model for the successful delivery of IT products and services.

Hypothesis

H-1: Supplier don't have good relationship with customer, causes failure to IT products and services delivery.

H-2 Adoption of effective relationship management model can prevent failure of project delivery.

Methods and Material

Intended research approach will be based on Exploratory Research Methodology. An appropriate research approach for the thesis would be to study/ analyze live projects data, best practices (Based on my experience for more than 100 software projects (Based on my 13 yrs. of IT career) , and conduct structured interviews .

1. To make in-depth study of small/medium sized 10 web based software projects with team strength ≥ 10 and build up cases with analysis of key risk factors.

2. To address questionnaire from 20 key persons, selected rationally from diff. projects within Tech Mahindra and other IT org. and analyze their responses.

Structured interviews enable the collection of "targeted data" while also allowing depth to be explored in areas of interest as they arise. A range of practitioners from major IT organizations are to be interviewed to form a multi-site field study. Initial interviews (with high-level managers) are highly structured. This is achieved by having prepared questions and by filling out a worksheet as the interview progresses. This provides a sense of the practices employed in general, whilst the use of interviews provides rich insights into practices utilized in specific organizations.

An appropriate approach for this study was to interview experienced project managers involved in execution & implementation of software projects in different IT (Information Technology) organizations. Traditionally it has not been viewed as the customer's role to be involved in risk management of the project. In part this was due to perceived conflicting goals the customer naturally desires more for less whereas IT project managers will need to supply deliverables within certain resource constraints. However as capability maturity model practice has matured, IT savvy customers have become aware of software project risks such as the consequences of making excessive demands. In contemporary practice, as the writer has observed, experienced customers and project managers recognize the need to work collaboratively, making compromises in order to achieve a successful outcome.

The Relationship management makes project delivery in global delivery models more effective and easier the interviewees were also unanimous in their attitude to risks related to customer relationship issues. In fact they all considered this risk to have the potential to supersede all other risks. They all reported that this risk was worth controlling and one or more techniques were used.

Supplier and Customer should agree the principles for engagement below following several workshops and based on feedback and Project Closures across several projects in IT Industry.

Relationship Principles

- Transparency ensures our mutual success
- Work together to achieve and collaborate to ensure mutual success
- Work together to understand and help resolve each other's pain
- Work together to understand and meet targets
- Understand one another's objectives and strive together to achieve them

Operational Principles

- Ensure open, honest two-way communication
- Realise the importance of flagging issues the earlier the better
- When we don't understand, we ask questions to clarify
- When we're stuck, we're open about it and we ask for help
- When in doubt, escalate
- We seek feedback. We accept it openly and not defensively. And we act on it.
- Treat people fairly and with respect - we do not ask of each other's resources what we would not ask of our own
- Recognise one another's cultures
- Think Continuous Improvement
- We use metrics to help us improve
- Track assigned actions to closure

Key Steps to Ensuring a Successful Engagement and a Quality Delivery

The following guidelines are based on lessons learned across many projects over the last couple of years. These will help to avoid similar issues occurring again!



Get the deliverables and receivable right

- Make no assumptions about what will be delivered without documenting them. Avoid, for example "I didn't specify code instrumentation as being a requirement but I would expect it to be delivered". If it's not specified, it won't be delivered.
- Ensure Functional, Non-Functional and Technical specifications use the templates agreed by the relevant Practice Lead
- Many projects have benefited from including some Supplier associates onshore during Functional Analysis and Technical Design phases. This benefits the project by allowing supplier to "hit the ground running" during the build phase

Consider the cultural issues

- Reinforce the following points with all supplier members of the team (use a video conference at the time of kicking off a project)
- It's OK to say "no". Under-commit and over-achieve.
- When you don't understand, you must say so
- Bad news delivered early is infinitely better than hidden bad news
- Use initiative and suggest better ways of doing things. We expect to be challenged. When we're not challenged, we take this as a sign that you may not understand what has been asked for.
- Keep asking questions until you understand. When you're stuck, say so!
- Deadlines are important. But quality is absolutely critical.

Adhere to relationship-level principles they're there to help you Ensure adherence to the principles outlined Error! Reference source not found.. The principles have been drawn up following feedback and Project Closures across many engaged projects.

Ensure up-front agreement on Standards, Templates and Processes

Agree up front what templates and standards will be used.

Take part in the Quality Assurance Processes

Quality Assurance Reviews take place as part of the production of a deliverable. They are sometimes referred to a peer reviews or code walkthroughs.

Acceptance Processes

Acceptance is the process of taking a deliverable from supplier and confirming whether it is as per specification and is of sufficient quality

Where, say, 25 Programme Specs are to be delivered, agree with supplier for an early delivery of 3 of the larger/higher complexity/higher priority Program Specs. Review them thoroughly with your Engineers and provide feedback. Do not wait until all 25 are delivered before reviewing!

- Your review comments will then be reflected in the production of the remaining documentation.
- There should not be a need to perform a comprehensive Acceptance Review on every deliverable. Instead, comprehensively review a sample of the deliverables. Where there are issues, ask supplier to address them for all deliverables.

Define your project governance and stick to it

- One or more strong supplier onshore coordinator(s) has proven to be key to successful offshore engagements.
- Hold Project Tracking conference calls every week without fail. Do not wait “until a call is needed”.
- Ensure supplier and Customer responsibilities are absolutely clear in the Project Statement
- Consider de-risking or sharing the risk by tying payments to milestones, requesting a fixed price or a capped time and materials price.

Escalate

- When in doubt, escalate.
- If you are not sufficiently happy with any member of the SUPPLIER team's performance, escalate immediately.
- Escalation will be handled sensitively.
- Both parties need to show understanding that escalating an issue is not personal but is often essential to resolve an issue.
- Remember that escalation is not just for the resolution of issues. It is a normal procedure used to make decisions outside your realm of accountability.

Adhere to Project Management fundamentals

- Involving SUPPLIER from the start (rather than just bringing them to the table at the Build Phase) decreases risk
- Focus on Acceptance Criteria at the start of the project. Ensure they are specific enough in the Project Statement..
- Ensure that the scope is very detailed at initiation and ensure tight Change Control is adhered to where the scope changes or is clarified during the course of the project.
- Ensure the SUPPLIER PM is absolutely clear that any changes to timelines due to scope changes or clarifications must be agreed at the time and must not be used as an excuse for problems later.
- Where SUPPLIER require a receivable from CUSTOMER to complete their work (e.g. a test strategy doc produced by CUSTOMER which is required before test cases are completed by SUPPLIER), ensure that these receivables are delivered as per the agreed plan.

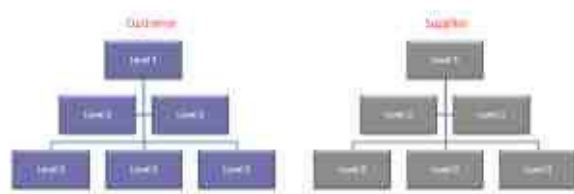
Communications

- Where agreements are made verbally, ensure they are recorded in writing in an email at the very least. Several issues have arisen where CUSTOMER and SUPPLIER teams have disagreed later about an agreement made verbally during the course of the project. ALWAYS follow up verbal agreements with a written record.
- Where an email is sent Offshore, remember that there may be a delay in Customer receipt and remember that Indian Standard Time (IST) is 5.5 or 4.5 (Winter/Summer) hours ahead of GMT
- Use videoconferences regularly (monthly at a minimum). They cost no more than a voice call and the value of meeting “face to face” should not be underestimated.

Have other tricks and tips worked well for you? Let the SUPPLIER Relationship Manager know what works and what doesn't so that these learnings can be shared across other projects.

Relationship and Communications Overview

The following diagram aims to explain communications (“who communicates with who”) between the various parties in the SUPPLIER Relationship as a whole (the “Programme”) and on a project-by-project basis (the “Project”).



Customer Contact	Supplier Mapping	Plan to Connect with
CXO	Y	
VPs	Y	
LOB Head	Y	
Group Head	Y	

The Onsite Coordinator

The Onsite Coordinator

- is a key SUPPLIER resource working with the project team in Ireland on a SUPPLIER-engaged offshore project
- has primarily a management role of coordinating communications between the teams
- is knowledgeable about project management, the software development cycle, SUPPLIER' QMS processes, business analysis and testing
- represents an SUPPLIER presence on the ground and is therefore the first point of escalation if the CUSTOMER PM is not happy
- provides day to day point of contact and status update to the Customer Project Manager.
- supports the Offshore team during all the phases of project execution through
 - resolving issues and queries from the Offshore team
 - providing technical input and support
 - interacting with Functional and Business experts onsite and conveying detailed functional requirements to the offshore team
 - ensuring required sign-offs are obtained (and where sign-offs are not forthcoming, communicates the issues or concerns)
 - resolving Development and Test Environment issues (e.g. data availability, region availability, link connectivity, firewall issues)
- often checks the quality of deliverables from Offshore before they are delivered to the Onshore team

Avoiding pitfalls associated with the Onsite Coordinator role

The following pit-falls have caused problems on various projects with respect to the Onsite Coordinator:

Common pitfalls	Suggested resolution
No Onsite Coordinator has been assigned to the project – typically to reduce costs	Assign an Onsite Coordinator for all Onshore/Offshore projects.
The Onsite Coordinator – who's role is to coordinate and enhance communications - has been given significant software development responsibility (and therefore is not a coordinator but an engineering resource on the team)	It must be recognised that the Onshore Co-ordinator is primarily a management role. the majority of who's time should be planned for management and communications activities.
When deadlines are tight – a time when coordination is critical – the Onsite Coordinator is pulled into technical development	Avoid this temptation which can cause further delay, not reduce it.
The Onsite Coordinator does not have a sufficient breadth of experience across analysis, project management, QMS, testing and technical development and this has not been escalated early enough	Ensure that a CV review is performed, followed by a telephone interview. Refer if possible to CUSTOMER PMs who have employed this individual in the past. Engage with CUSTOMER's SUPPLIER Relationship Manager if not happy with quality of candidates being proposed by SUPPLIER.
One coordinator has been spread across too many projects to provide sufficient value to all	Other than in exceptional circumstances , onshore co-ordinator should be dedicated to a single offshore team
All communication is channelled through the Onsite Coordinator who becomes a bottleneck	Establish relationships between CUSTOMER PM and SUPPLIER PM directly and resources in other roles where necessary.
The CUSTOMER PM thought the Onsite Coordinator reports to her; the SUPPLIER PM believed the Onsite Coordinator reports to him	The Onshore Coordinator typically reports to the Offshore PM, but clearly will assist the CUSTOMER PM where possible. If there is contention for the Coordinator's time, this should be discussed at PM to PM level.

1.1 Minimum Communication Schedule for Offshore Projects

The following table provides a guideline as to what communications typically occur between on- and off-shore teams on a project.

Frequency	What	When	Who	Output
Daily	General project communication	Daily for duration of a project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onshore and Offshore Teams Communication facilitated by SUPPLIER Onsite Coordinator 	
Weekly	Project Review Conference Call	Weekly at time agreed at start of project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CUSTOMER PM Onsite Coordinator SUPPLIER Offshore PM Other team members as required 	Minutes and actions tracked Updated Risk/Issue Register Updated plan
Quarterly	Project Manager Feedback	End of each calendar quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CUSTOMER PMs who ran project engagement in previous quarter CUSTOMER PMs with significant numbers of Professional Services resources 	Consolidated Results Presentation Actions identified are tracked

The following table provides a guideline as to what communications typically occur at the relationship (or "Programme") level. The outputs are generally shared with all PMs. PMs are free to request any of the outputs below.

Frequency	What	When	Who	Output
Weekly	Programme Review Conference Call	Tuesday 10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUPPLIER Relationship Manager (CUSTOMER) SUPPLIER Onsite Manager CUSTOMER Account Manager (SUPPLIER) All Offshore PMs (SUPPLIER) 	Reviewed Programme Report Published
Monthly	SUPPLIER Programme Update	Last Thursday in Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUPPLIER Relationship Manager (CUSTOMER) CUSTOMER Execs 	SUPPLIER Programme Update slides
Quarterly	Relationship Review	End of each calendar quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUPPLIER Relationship Manager (CUSTOMER) CUSTOMER Execs SUPPLIER Onsite Manager CUSTOMER Account Manager (SUPPLIER) 	Agreed areas of focus for next quarter
Annually	Contract Review	Anniversary of contract signing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUPPLIER Relationship Manager (CUSTOMER) CUSTOMER Legal SUPPLIER Onsite Manager CUSTOMER Account Manager (SUPPLIER) SUPPLIER Legal 	Revised contract.

Other communications include:

- Half-yearly Risk Review

REFERENCES

Jiang, J. J., Klein, G., Chen, H.-G., & Laura, L. (2002). Reducing user-related risks during and prior to system development. *International Journal of Project Management*, 20, p507-515. | Mous, K., Ko, K., Lee, S., Tan, P., & Lee, E. (2007). High-level Business Processes for Agile B2B Collaboration. In *Proceedings of the 35th International MATADOR Conference* (pp. 169-172). | Plakoyiannaki, E. and N. Tzokas (2001), "Customer Relationship Management: a Capability Portfolio Perspective", *Conference Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy Conference (EMAC)*, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration, Bergen, Norway.

Project-level Governance

Each Project maintains Customer own project tracking, risk management, dependency identification as normal these do not change if the project has been offshored.

Governance should be agreed at the start of a project and documented. It is typically documented in SUPPLIER' Project Proposal. A project-level Responsibility Accountability Consulted Informed (RACI) should also be agreed.

The process outlined is the recommended approach to be used for all projects.

It is important to note that

- the CUSTOMER Project Manager is accountable for project delivery
- the SUPPLIER Project Manager offshore reports to the SUPPLIER Account Manager
- the SUPPLIER Project Manager has a dotted line report into the CUSTOMER Project Manager for the duration of the project
- the Onsite Coordinator reports to the SUPPLIER PM offshore with a dotted line into the CUSTOMER PM (not the other way around)

Escalation

Escalation is clearly not only used for resolving issues. It is also used where an individual needs a decision made which they judge to be beyond their remit.

Escalation of issues

"If there are issues, spot them and manage them. Escalate early. Don't wait and use these issues as an excuse at the end of a project."

The CUSTOMER PM should escalate immediately where

- there is disagreement between the CUSTOMER and SUPPLIER PMs which cannot be resolved
- a deliverable is late or of insufficient quality
- any SUPPLIER resource is not performing as required

The Escalation Process for CUSTOMER Project Managers is:

- Notify your Onshore Coordinator and your Offshore PM of your concern and agree next steps to recover in writing
- If you can not agree, or the agreed next steps are not followed, notify the SUPPLIER Relationship Manager (and the SUPPLIER Relationship Manager)
- If you are unhappy with the response, notify the CUSTOMER Exec responsible for your project via your line manager

The Escalation Process for SUPPLIER Project Managers is:

- Inform SUPPLIER Onsite Project Coordinator and CUSTOMER Project Manager of your concern and agree next steps to recover in writing
- If response is not satisfactory, escalate to CUSTOMER Relationship Manager and SUPPLIER Onsite Manager
- If you are unhappy with the response, notify the SUPPLIER Account Manager and (if required) the SUPPLIER Software Delivery Centre (SDC) Head

Conclusion

Successful delivery of IT Products and Services is an important subject due to the high failure rate of software Projects. There is a wealth of information available in the literature on customer supplier relationship management for the IT projects, However yet I find , there are significant gaps in the literature and there is need of in-depth research to define effective customer supplier relationship management model for Global IT industry, which is required for the successful delivery of IT products and services.



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