

Project Coaching with John

A telecommunications company used project coaching to coach a group of project managers who worked on projects in their IT section. The group were mixed in age and project management experience. The organisation was at a reasonable level of project management maturity and many projects were delivered successfully. The company's objectives were to develop their project managers further and get them to the next level in preparation for a major renewal of IT systems that were in the planning stages.

John had been in the company for 18 months and there was a sense that he was struggling to cope with the large and complex projects that were assigned to him. His boss indicated that John worked hard and was good technically and in applying project management tools and techniques. His concern was that John struggled when it came to establishing good relations with his peers, project stakeholders and project teams. There had been a number of incidents recently where John acted in an inappropriate manner and alienated key project stakeholders. His projects were suffering.

6 coaching sessions took place over a period of 3 months. Tools and techniques included the Wheel of Life, GROW model and the BarOn EQ-i[®] instrument to define John's Emotional Intelligence profile.

John was a reluctant client who saw his primary role as making sure that the project team members were 'doing their jobs and not shirking their responsibilities'. His Wheel of Life results showed that he was focussing so much energy on his project management work that other areas of his life were being neglected. He was 'off-balance' and this was impacting on both his work and personal lives.

His BarOn EQ-i[®] profile showed a reasonable overall level of emotional intelligence. However, there were peaks and troughs. For example, assertiveness, one of the key scales related to successful project managers, was high in relation to some of the other scales.

Assertiveness is not the same thing as aggressiveness. The assertive project manager, even in uneasy situations, accepts and respects others and does not put them down. They express themselves easily in a forthright manner.

Achieving success is at the heart of projects and is what drives successful project managers. Assertive project managers are positioned to give themselves every chance of achieving their goals because they can state clearly what is expected, what they believe in and how they feel. And they make sure that there is no possibility for ambiguity – which is at the root of many a project failure.

Assertive project managers will stand their ground in situations where others might cave in. They will be particularly effective in defending their own actions and the actions of their teams, but in a non-destructive way. This is a crucial trait in winning and maintaining the trust, respect and engagement of team members and other key stakeholders.

However, and as demonstrated by John's behaviour, he crossed the line between being

appropriately assertive and being aggressive, blunt and loud. He was alienating people and damaging key relationships important to project success. In addition, he was creating a harsh and uncomfortable team environment. He was obviously failing to leverage the talents available in an optimum way. There were problems in listening and taking the opinions of others on board - a touch of “my way or the highway” was evident. All of these things were reflected in his poor project results.

Over the course of the 6 coaching sessions, the project coach used powerful and probing inquiry techniques to access and stimulate John’s thinking by getting him to reflect and understand the effects of his behaviour on projects. Because the coach was also an experienced project manager, the coaching led to powerful insights by John accompanied by the will to take specific actions that would improve his project performance.

For example, one of the goals agreed was that John would mend some fences with some of the colleagues he had alienated. The agreed approach was that John would seek their help and advice in relation to project matters. In all cases, his colleagues responded in a positive way and he quickly began to see them as allies instead of enemies.

John also started to work in a different way with his project teams. He realised that the way he was managing was much too controlling and he needed to have more confidence in his teams, delegate more, and trust that team members would live up to their commitments and responsibilities. He freed his team and ‘gave them their wings’. This resulted in more engagement, commitment, innovation and creativity – the things that are usually make the difference between project success and failure.

John also realised that his life was out of balance and that in order to perform effectively in his working life; he needed to stop neglecting his personal life. He found over time that his new ways of working enabled him to reduce his working hours and levels of stress. His confidence grew and he had some early successes. All of these factors had beneficial effects on his life outside of work which of course is usually positive for performance in the workplace.

PM Edge would be delighted to discuss ways we can work together to make your projects work. Please feel free to contact us at any time at info@pmedge.ie or by visiting <http://www.pmedge.ie>.