

Note on Muktasamwad-Leadership and Project Management- 10th Dec 2011

This time Chatur Knowledge Networking (CKN) collaborated with Project Management Institute (PMI, Pune Chapter) to organize Mukta Samwaad (MS). Sheetal Gore introduced the theme of MS, talked about CKN and PMI and how Knowledge Sharing on common platforms leads to learning. The topic for discussion was "Leadership and Project Management". The three panel members were Mr.V.J.Rao (Country Head HR, Suzlon Energy Ltd.) Mrs.Sudha Canan(Head, Wisdom Consulting) and Mr.Girish Kelkar(President, Project Management Institute, Pune- Deccan India Chapter). Some of the thoughts which they have shared are compiled below-

Sudha -Sudha focused on 3 key learnings of leadership and elaborated the same by sharing an experience. She was part of a recruitment/HR consulting company. A project enquiry came in from the Govt and World Bank. Her 3 learnings were:

1. See Possibility- this needs lot of exploration, being open and then convincing and learning.
2. Hang-in-there – there will be many difficulties, one needs to be patient, and take up the challenge to resolve difficulties.
3. "Work with you" value – for her the "Seva Bhav" value- to be of service was important. This was actually transforming service providers' behavior towards their customers who were their patients. This was first piloted in Ahmednagar hospital which was then done in 18 hospitals across Maharashtra. Challenges began at the Commissioner's office at the time of proposal – He was candid and stated his apprehensions – You are not a doctor, you are a woman and you are too soft spoken!!

Learnings –

1. Right from how to organize and willingness to do anything – eg clearing and cleaning the training facility.
2. Determination – Her organization did not believe that they should get into Govt projects...no resources were provided as revenues were uncertain. She had support only from her CEO. From this state of mind for the company to eventually this becoming one of the major projects was a challenge to determination.
3. The biggest motivator for Sudha was that she was serving 6000 people who would then go and serve 6 lakh people. It wasn't how many crores the govt was getting out of this project, or it wasn't what was someone else getting out of this project- but the fact that she got an opportunity to serve 6 lakh people indirectly. (Seva Bhav).
4. Mental and Spiritual Strength required for managing the project – This eventually was rolled out in several states. The project won awards. Train the Trainer modules were also implemented and all in all the entire Project was successfully executed.

One of the things which gets measured here is the leader's determination and the need to serve

VJ Rao- He spoke about a completely commercial and unique project which he was asked to lead- in 2005 for Aviva Global Services. They were a small team of 30 people- to do a Build-Operate-Transfer in the BPO space in India- It was probably the largest BOT which was envisaged. The idea was Aviva quickly wanted to set up shops in India, quickly wanted to build their 'back offices'- both into voice, non-voice and customer service. And Aviva didn't want to do it all by themselves so they tied up with 3 customers -WNS, 24/7 and EXL. The idea was that these 3 suppliers would build, operate their services and there was a pre-determined period for 3 years after which services would be transferred to Aviva.

This 3 year project- with approximately 6500 people across 4 centers(Pune, Noida, Bangalore, Chennai) in India and 1 center in Colombo (400 people) was one of the first of its kinds and therefore fraught with a set of challenges.

Challenges-

1. Time span: It was a 3 year project; a 3year period was not a very comfortable period for all us – so how could we break it up in milestones for exciting, challenging and engaging our talented team. This was tough because Mr.Rao had a very aggressive team and they had to show them milestones, rewards which were for shorter duration during the three year period.

2. There were three different partners who had their own style of working, own philosophy, own culture of working. The people were to be hired by the partners, trained and managed by partners. And only after 3 years they would be transferred to Aviva- so till then how should Aviva manage this/oversee this for 3 years without really directing was one of the big challenges.

3. They had 1700 people in Bangalore who were first to be taken into Aviva Global Services. So how does one really make people feel safe, secure and agree to what it was like, really transferring into Aviva Global Services.

4. The physical structure was not an issue- whether you entered a EXL, 24/7 or WNS color schemes, space between desks, the look and feel were the same- the technology, architecture were same- only people practices(recruitment, training, compensation and managing people) were different. So there were really two challenges- one long term view of how they would work out the whole thing and the other an immediate transition- closer to the date of what would you do during the actual transition. One of the personal challenges for Mr.Rao was that he was the last person to be recruited to join his team at Aviva Global Services. And his team members came with their own aspirations, agenda and ambitions. So he got a ready-made team which was also a big challenge.

5. The other challenge was to envisage the end scenario, how would we actually look like 3 years from now, and that alignment to get between 3 partners was a bit of a challenge. Sensitivity between operating styles (since one could not be directive but a little prescriptive) -how does one bring alignment to the end goal, to the intermediate goal, to the metrics and more. At the same time allowing it to run its way-without being imposing was also a challenge.

6. Therefore what do we standardize and what do we customize between these kind of issues that we have, extent of differentiation that we would permit, and where would we draw the boundary line for these project challenges.

7. People and leadership alignment- 6,500 is a huge number for a big client, Big revenue for all the three centers for the first three years and therefore how do we make them feel secure to give up the revenue at the end of three years. The global leadership at Aviva changed at the end of 3 years and therefore who is the real owner of this project and who would really report to was a big challenge.

Major learnings -

1. What do we do pre, during and post? So there was a planning stage, operational stage and post integration stage or a post acquisition stage. So a lot of planning, alignment, thought, communication, transparency, engagement had to set up for each of the service providers.

2. Don't force fit cultures. Since they didn't want to impose Aviva culture on a EXL culture nor did they want to look for commonality they spelt out AVIVA values, and measured each of the service providers in relation to their alignment to these values through diagnostics, surveys, instruments on culture and

measure the distance from the values of each of the service providers and try to close that rather than force fitting any culture.

3. Setting expectations that hold people accountable. All the service providers were led by owners who were held by a public limited company. And therefore how do you set expectations with them was one of the challenges. And also protect his team from external noise at the same time hold his team accountable was one of the learnings he had.

Girish Kelkar- On 27th July 1988- decision to be taken in company – forming a new company –there were 5 Directors and 1600 employees- setting up offices in 11 cities employing 685 employees- faith and guts was required to do it.

Challenges-

- 1) If we split new company- if the young Director can't handle it.
- 2) Decision- let's do this! Setting up a new company, all 11 offices operational.

Need/Learning-

- 1) Phenomenal focus on clarity of what you want to achieve/purpose
- 2) Balance-communication down the line/other directors, in a given short time span
- 3) Sensitivity- what happens to the new salaries
- 4) Faith in myself (institutionalize faith down the line)

Predominant focus on Goal-

- Working Abhimanyu's know how to get out of the chakravyuha- create themselves
- Continuous precision, convincing, 10 guys to go to 11 cities- book air tickets
- Sensitivity- salaries fixed for new guys-10 people- company still exists- 22 crores- revenue in 18 months
- Communication-60/74 hours

Major Learning: Leadership in Project Management comes into play when you need to challenge assumptions and constraints; here innovation is needed. Institutionalizing conviction that you can be a winner.

