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Quality Management: An Extended Arm of Project Management

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Quality Management is one of the key process areas, which if planned and executed right would directly translate into a perfectly executed and delivered projects, satisfied customers and continuous business.

Many of the organizations today are in the process of building a dedicated Quality team (Q-team) internal, or external to the project, to ensure that quality standards and processes are adhered to within the project. The importance of quality management is gradually being absorbed at the grass-root level.

Project quality- A key determiner for project success

The importance of quality in a project can be understood by visualizing the journey of an aeroplane.

Consider an organization to a big size airport. There would be many different airlines & aircrafts of different sizes in the same airport. These are similar to the large & short duration projects undertaken by the organization. The pilots are the project managers who are responsible for taking these projects from one point in the system to another, similar to the journey of the flight from start to destination. The senior managers or authorities are sponsors of these airlines or projects. In addition, there are the various support groups like the human resources, administrative teams, technical support (technicians) teams that ensure that the operations continue uninterrupted similar to the ground crew, cabin crew and operations support people for an airline.

Now the important question here is 'Where does the quality team come into the picture?'

To ensure the safe journey of a flight, in-fact many flights - the Air Traffic Controller (ATC) is the most important entity responsible. Without being on the flight, they ensure that all prerequisites & checks before take-off are complete. They monitor & ensure a planned take-off & similarly a smooth planned landing. Moreover, during the flight they continuously monitor the flight plan keeping an eye on the actual data like altitude, speed, flight path etc. In case of turbulence they warn the pilots & also guide the aircraft to safety.

Similarly, the Q- team is an important entity to the projects as an ATC is to a flight. Quality team ensures that during the Initiation and Planning phase, the 'Project Management Plan' is created and released, signed copy of contract is available for reference, estimation and scheduling done, and the project is all ready to take off.

During the project execution phase, periodic audits help understand if the project is being executed as per the plan and whether there are any warning signs of the project running into turbulence. They suggest corrective plan to bring the project back on the right

path in case of any deviation from the plan. Finally, at the closure phase the Q-team ensures that the deliverables meet the planned quality standards. At this stage, all project related artefacts are collated and archived into the organization repository that will help similar projects in future.

Therefore, the Q-team is as an extended arm of the project for successful execution and completion of the project. Hence, it is very important to identify this team as a key stakeholder when formulating the 'Projects Stakeholders Matrix'.

Q team from the beginning

Involving the Q-team right at the initial stages of the projects would mean gaining invaluable input from past projects for the project team. Some of these beneficial inputs are common defects / issues encountered during the past projects, learning's, good practices, commonly encountered risks, constraints, and a guide to realistic schedule estimation and resource estimation, etc.

Normally, it so happens that during project execution when pressure of delivery builds up, knowingly or unknowingly there tends to be a compromise on quality. At this point, the project teams tend to overlook or skip key processes like reviews, capturing common defects, documentation of key decisions/ changes etc. This is where the Q-team plays an important role of 'Quality Assurance' to ensure that no corners are cut. In fact, they serve as a third eye to the project manager and senior management to ascertain that the project is employing all

processes to maintain the committed level of quality, thereby meeting the project's requirement.

Escalation to the senior management in case of a significant deviation would be a timely trigger to ensure that there would be no surprises at a later stage and to ensure that the project team would take corrective action to get back on the right path at the earliest.

Capturing metrics and data analysis is a vital activity when it comes to efficient monitoring & controlling of the project. From the analysis, the Q-team can help the project team understand the current status & predict where the project is headed.

Q-team adds value by participating in & driving forums like 'Defect Prevention Meetings' by making sure that these activities are done in the right spirit.

Conclusion

Having quality models like CMMI & standards like ISO is a necessity for any Organization in today's competitive environment. The organization can only achieve certifications if the individual projects comply with processes and standards. Preparation for these mandatory

certifications/ standards is a big task and time-consuming too. This is where the competence and skill of the Q-team comes handy. They drive these key initiatives, thereby ensuring that both the project and organization attains their ultimate goals.

About the Author



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Joji is a PMP certified IT professional with strong process and consulting experience of 26+ years in the field of program/ project management /consulting across various technologies in the IT & telecommunication domain, IT process & quality, IT infrastructure management and HR (campus recruitment) function. He has been associated with LTI for 13+ years, working across the various DU's/ PU's / BEU's.

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