

Top 10 project management trends for 2011: Leadership skills tops the list

ESI International

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On January 4, ESI International, the world's leading project management learning company, revealed its Top 10 Global Project Management Trends for 2011. Key themes include building the project manager's (PM) influence, accelerating new leadership and communication skills, and increased use of informal learning approaches such as social media and experiential training. A global panel of consultants and senior executives assembled by ESI identified the trends.

Leadership Skills Will Be the PM's Critical Success Factor

Leadership skills, such as critical thinking, crucial communication and organizational change management, will be strategically imperative project management competencies to master. In 2011's project management landscape – featuring more complex projects and greater use of virtual teams – being on time and on budget will require not just a laser-like focus on the triple constraints, but on the requisite leadership skills necessary for an individual PM's success. The challenge for organizations will be to clearly define what “leadership” means in the project and program management context.

No Industry Will Be Spared from the War for PM Talent

Savvy talent management and retention strategies will be essential to ward off poaching in 2011. Although economic recovery has been uneven worldwide, PMs with the greatest mobility and experience will have the best opportunities for career growth through “overseas” assignments. In particular, India and China will continue to be plagued by a dearth of competent and experienced PMs to manage large and complex infrastructure and IT projects. Additionally, as mega-projects at the King Abdullah Economic City north of Jidda and King Abdullah Financial District on the outskirts of Riyadh kick into high gear, more opportunities for work in the Middle East will become a reality.

Agile Will Be Seen for What It Is ... and Isn't

Project management organizations embracing Agile software and product development approaches will continue to grow while being faced with the challenge of demonstrating ROI through Agile adoption. In addition, they will need to disabuse their stakeholders and executives of the expectations set by IT consultants, the media and the vendor community that Agile is the next “silver bullet.” Organizations that do it right – including selecting the right projects for Agile – will reap significant rewards.

Competency Models Will Be Core to Managing Professional Development and Promotions for PMs

As project management gains greater acceptance as a discipline, the hiring, assignment, promotion and professional development of PMs will be based on comprehensive competency models. In order for these models to be effective, they must be company-specific. Competency models illuminate the behaviors required for a PM to be successful and take on larger and more complex projects. Accordingly, the CLO (or senior HR executive), business unit heads and the enterprise project management office (EPMO) need to work shoulder-to-shoulder to identify and codify organization-specific competencies, thereby building a framework for talent management success.

Experiential Learning Will Be More the Norm than the Exception

The professional development of PMs will increasingly focus on reality-based learning and on-the-job training, an approach certain organizations in Asia have taken for many years. Learning providers will be

required to send PMs back to the job from such sessions with the ability to immediately apply what they learned to their current projects. Even the many universities that offer project management degrees will face the challenge of making their courses and programs relevant, practical and pragmatic based on participants' real projects. The lecture mode is dead and any training provider or university who ignores it does so at its peril.

Informal Learning for PMs Will Gain Momentum

Organizations will continue to develop and exploit informal learning approaches such as communities of practice (CoP), various forms of social media, as well as coaching and mentoring. With millennials joining the workforce in greater numbers, we will witness more effective use of social learning technologies and approaches, such as wikis, blogs, videos, podcasts and other methods of communication. With four generations now in the workplace, it is not only the millennials who will benefit by such relatively new forms of learning. However, the great Zen kōan question of the day is, "If informal learning becomes formal, does it become formal learning?" If the answer is yes, do we search for more informal learning to formalize?

Project Sponsorship Will Become an Area of Focus in South Asia

The roles and responsibilities of the project sponsor will be a key focus in South Asia, especially in India and Bangladesh, as organizations try to accelerate their structured approach to project management. Such organizations are trying to avoid the experience of others in their industries around the world whose "spotty" record of success in project sponsorship has contributed in whole, or in part, to less than successful projects.

Outsourcing Will Remain a Risky Business

The continued growth of outsourcing will force organizations to pay more heed to its associated risks and conduct better due diligence. As a response, organizations will strengthen their risk management cultures and recognize the value of best practices in contract management. More than a euphemism, the word "sourcing" will replace the term outsourcing as it more accurately describes the resource allocation approach both internally and externally for many organizations.

PMs Will Team with 'Change Partners' and Use Structured Methods to Facilitate Adoption

Projects initiate change and PMs are change agents. Yet, they have been ill-equipped to facilitate the type of change required to adopt the product or service the project delivers. In 2011, we will see more organizations developing and assigning "change partners," also known as change management experts, to projects to assist in such adoption. Moreover, project teams will slowly, but steadily, increase their use of change management methods, which will be packaged as methodologies.

The PMP Will Continue its 'World Domination', but Will No Longer Be Enough

With more than 400,000 holders, the PMP will continue to be the most popular project management credential in the world, outpacing every one of its rivals as the "credential of choice" among practitioners. While most organizations will continue to support their PMs in earning the credential, the value of proven experience and demonstrated competency will take on even more relevance beyond having the certification itself.

"Project management continues to play a critical role in driving operational efficiencies," said J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, executive vice president, ESI. "Savvy business leaders are putting more stead in project management to fine tune their competitive advantage. Alongside technical savvy, other skills such as negotiation, communication, critical thinking, change management and leadership are taking on new importance for project managers. Influence and organizational agility will be key factors for performance improvement going forward."

About ESI International

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