Abstract

Titel: Planning and Controlling in Remote Project Teams

Kurzzusammenfassung: Distributing project work across different locations enables companies to benefit from, for example, access to talents and using different time zones for their advantage. Nevertheless, remote project teams are challenging, especially the planning and controlling. Insufficient face-to-face contact, challenging recognition of problems, and deficiency of identification and commitment are some challenges to be mentioned. By implementing agile project management, buddy systems or virtual planning tools, the planning and controlling in remote project teams can be improved.

Verfasser/-in: Fabienne Jasmin Loser

Herausgeber/-in: **Roger Martin**

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Initial Position

The company is specialised in surveying and geographical measurement technology. Annually, a large number of projects is performed. Several projects are conducted remotely, which means that the project team is distributed to two or more different locations. Different time zones and cultural differences are challenging, additionally, communication is more complicated. Therefore, approaches to improve the planning and controlling, based on theory and benchmarking, should be presented.

Goal

Due to globalisation, more and more companies work internationally. The number of remote or virtual project teams is increasing. Different time-zones, few face-to-face contact and cultural differences lead to more difficult collaboration and communication compared to traditional project teams. Especially the planning and controlling, where all team members need to be included, are challenging. The aim of this Bachelor Thesis is to give an overview about the possibilities to improve the planning and controlling in remote project teams.

Methodological Approach

For the analysis of the current situation, three employees experienced in remote project management were interviewed. The approach is described in the research design. In addition, benchmarking was conducted. Based on the research design, employees of three different companies were interviewed.

Results

By conducting an analysis of the current situation, various underlying problems were detected. To improve the planning and controlling, different theoretical sources were consulted. In addition, the conducted benchmarking indicates potential solutions for the previously detected problems. The following table gives an overview about possible problems when working in remote project teams.

Problem	Description
No face-to-face kick-off	Due to various reasons, a face-to-face kick-off might not be conducted, for instance due to cost or time reasons. This can lead to complicated project planning and lower commitment by the team members. In addition, disagreements with crucial topics might not be detected, for example if a project member perceives a certain work package as not manageable in the assigned time.
Deficiency of identification and commitment	Identification with the project plan might be hampered when working at different locations. In addition, due to different

	cultures and locations, team identification is lower than in regular teams. This can lead to less commitment and decrease of productivity.
Challenging recognition of problems	Project managers are not always aware of problems at the different locations due to limited communication. In addition, time sensitive problems might not be discussed if the concerned team members are not collocated.
Incomplete information flow	The incomplete information flow covers not only official information but also informal information such as motivation, tension or insecurities. Through different locations, communication ways are more complicated compared to regular teams. Therefore, the project manager might realise problems later as awareness is missing.

To improve the planning and controlling in remote project teams, potential solutions for the detected problems were derived and are described in the following table.

Problem	Approach
No face-to-face kick-off	**Virtual Planning Games**, for instance RealtimeBoard and Jira, are online tools where the planning can be conducted virtually and in real time. Every team member has access to the project plan and integrated communication applications (e.g. chat, audio and video conference) facilitate interaction between locations.
Deficiency of identification and commitment	The face-to-face planning can be replaced by **Planning Poker** which facilitates the planning process. Each team member estimates a time necessary for a task and simultaneously, the cards are presented to all members. If there is a difference, the process restarts until there is a consensus. To compensate the missing team building, a **buddy system** can connect team members from different locations and increase mutual understanding.
Challenging recognition of problems	**Agile methods** (e.g. sprints) increase the involvement of all team members. A bottom-up approach increases employee motivation and commitment towards the project plan. During **daily Scrum meetings**, which last 15 minutes at most, the

	following are discussed: what each team member did yesterday, what they will do today, and if anything is hindering them from proceeding. Problems are not discussed during this meeting. However, if a problem is occurring, the relevant team members can be invited for an additional meeting. Display tools suitable for agile project management are burndown charts and cumulative flow diagrams. They consider the short iterations of the agile approach.
	With the aforementioned **buddy system**, team identification can be increased. It prolongs the effects of conducted team building and facilitates the elimination of conflicts.
Incomplete information flow	When the main project manager has assigned project managers at the different locations, a **virtual coffee** can increase the informal information flow. This irregular calls simulate the random meetings at the coffee machine and informal aspects, for instance feelings and concerns, are discussed without protocol.
	The **daily Scrum meetings** can increase the information flow as issues are discussed in a timely manner. In addition, there is a tendency towards increased information sharing during those daily meetings.

Sources

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