

A Talk on “The Business Perspective for Project Managers”

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THE Project Management Technical Division (PMTD) of IEM organised a two-hour talk entitled, “The Business Perspective for Project Managers” on 8 January 2011, at the auditorium in Wisma IEM, Petaling Jaya. This talk was conducted in collaboration with PMXPRTZ Sdn Bhd, a project management consultancy working globally to raise project management awareness among the public and private sectors. Chaired by Ir. Noor Iziddin Abdullah bin Haji Ghazali, the talk was delivered by Mr. Viji Abishegam, Company Director of PMXPRTZ. He is a professional member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) and a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®).

During his service with Ericsson and Semcon Project Management, Mr. Viji Abishegam contributed to the development of global project management capability via competence development and consulting assignments. In this regard, he developed and delivered training programs from the introductory to the advanced level to align project teams with the business imperatives of the organisation as well as to keep abreast of the latest developments in the profession.

The primary objective of the talk was to introduce the audience to the changing landscape of project management, where the priority of key stakeholders has shifted from technical issues to business-related issues. Within the performing organisation, this shift has primarily moved the viewpoint of the management from an internal operation-based focus to a market-driven customer focus. Project management has responded to this change by embracing the broader fields of general management to equip project teams with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil stakeholders’ expectations regarding a project’s performance. Stakeholders’ expectations are changing in the following ways:

- Technical success is being taken for granted – the customer’s perspective is “You are the technical experts and that is why we hired you; technical matters do not interest us. Our key interest is in how much value you will add to our business”.
- The evaluation of project performance will be directly linked to financial indicators, including profitability and cash flow.
- Project documentation, especially status reports, must reflect the business element in a more comprehensive manner to address the reader’s needs.
- The impact of the project (especially the business impact) on both the performing and the customer’s organisations needs to be prioritised and scrutinised for lessons learned and continuous improvement.

In line with the increased expectations of the stakeholder community, project teams have to address their own knowledge and skill levels to deliver the desired results. The demands on project teams, especially project managers, can be summarised as follows:

- Awareness of the direct link between project performance and the organisation’s financial status. The consequences of the project team’s capabilities not only determine the key financial performance indicators, but also have a broader impact on customer relationships, competitiveness and strategic growth.
- Understanding of accounting and financial concepts and tools and the ability to apply them to project planning and execution. This includes understanding the business case for the project and hence, a deeper appreciation of project objectives within the context of the organisation’s strategic goals.
- A shift in perspective in the approach to project management from being preoccupied with technical matters to adopting an entrepreneurial attitude in achieving project objectives. The challenge for the project manager is in infusing this entrepreneurial thinking into the project team culture and also managing the business needs of key stakeholders.
- Conscious ownership of business results and an active acceptance of responsibility for the consequences and impact of project decisions on the stakeholder community.

The above expectations place stringent requirements on the skills and knowledge of the project teams to include the ability to be versatile and address issues at all levels of the stakeholder community. This is in the context of what the customer or project team needs. This versatility encompasses the fields of finance, contractual law and risk management. It is incumbent upon both organisations and individuals to ensure that the competence development plans for the project teams address this need. The confidence and leadership qualities expected from project managers is critically dependent on their keeping abreast with these current developments in the profession.

A total of 80 participants from various industries attended the talk. The audience included both corporate members and graduate members of IEM. At the end of the talk, Mr. Viji Abishegam received a certificate of appreciation and a memento from Ir. Noor Iziddin Abdullah. Feedback from the participants was encouraging with some indicating their intention to pursue a project management certification soon. It is hoped that more engineers will participate in this series of talks to enhance their professional knowledge as well as professional career. ■