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Work It Out

Use performance expectation workshops to role-play through problems.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Members of a project team or organization cannot be expected to perform according to a specific preferred set of expectations or culture unless that culture is well-defined. Even if solutions seem like common sense, most participants are unsure of what is expected of them. Performance expectation (or PX) workshops help define these expectations so they can be discussed and addressed across an organization.

The typical PX workshop lasts a day and involves 10 to 20 participants who submit two or three questions based on problems they've been experiencing. During the highly interactive workshops, participants role-play through those problems to arrive at the best solutions.

The facilitator should be an experienced resource manager or project manager with a strong background in coaching, mentoring and leading teams. He or she should also possess strong people skills and a sense of the performance expectations for which the participants must strive. Although the facilitator could be contracted short-term from outside the company, it's best to develop these skills from within your company long-term.

Before the session begins, the facilitator outlines the ground rules. Nearly any topic is fair game. While attacking people is never permitted, attacking problems is healthy and necessary. All participants should be given the chance

to discuss problems pertaining to their specific interests.

Common questions include:

- How do I say "no"?
- How do I identify and manage priorities throughout the day?
- How do I hold people accountable for their commitments?
- How do I run more effective meetings?
- How do I escalate issues to closure?
- How do I avoid being "too soft"?
- How do I manage conflict?
- How do I deal with an uncooperative stakeholder?
- How do I deal with too many meetings?
- How do I determine my domain of responsibility?
- What is the best style of leadership?

Seeking Solutions

After the group role-plays issues, the facilitator offers his or her views on the proposed solutions and identifies the best one. The answer could be a previously mentioned idea, one offered by the facilitator or a combination of the two. After one last opportunity for discussion, the group moves on to the next problem.

The last hour of the workshop is reserved for questions that accumulate throughout the day. Because some issues require the attention of a senior manager, having the head of the organization attend this part can boost results. The workshop can also serve as a great opportunity for senior management and

participants to communicate honestly and directly.

To ensure the lessons learned survive beyond the workshop's doors, consider recording the best solutions to each of the problems discussed. After the workshop, compile the notes in a question-and-answer format. Management can then review the responses to ensure they best represent the actions and behaviors the organization endorses. The document evolves as more workshops are performed. This way, a single document can be referred to for organizational expectations.

Problems vary widely from organization to organization and project to project, depending on the maturity of the organization and the participants. Therefore, the PX workshop is an iterative process. All members of an organization should have the opportunity to participate in at least one per year. Some organizations may have members attend several.

Organizations that successfully implement PX workshops will find people rise to an expectation—once they understand what that expectation is. **PM**

Neal Whitten, PMP, president of The Neal Whitten Group, is a speaker, trainer, consultant, mentor and author. His latest book is Neal Whitten's No-Nonsense Advice for Successful Projects.

