think180 **Learning to Manage an Outsourced Project**
"Help - I Can't Think of Everything!"
Jim Everett, Think180™

Taking on an outsourced project for the first time can be a challenge and a steep learning curve. To the new Project Leader, it can feel like they are expected to think of everything.

When an entire department moves to outsourcing for the first time, the head of that department can be overwhelmed in anticipating everything that will need to be addressed and included in the agreement.

Of course, it is impossible to think of every possible contingency. But most new Project Leaders and Department Heads know that if they miss something, it may come back and bite them later.

If the vendors are being selected by experienced Sourcing experts, and agreements drawn up by experienced Legal professionals, then that takes away some of the guesswork. This experience is a huge asset in planning a project, ensuring complete and accurate agreements, and solving problems as they arise in a project underway.

But experience is not the only factor. Being able to think of everything is a combination of brainpower (cognitive capacity), mindset, culture and values, imagination, training, and experience.

For example, if a manager's preferred way of working and mindset is expediency ("Let's just get this done!") rather than thoroughness, care and attention to detail and possible risks, then likely there will be gaps and errors that may cause problems later.

And if a new manager has always worked as specialist and is used to a single precise methodology, they may find it difficult working with the ambiguities and uncertainties of managing a new project assigned to a somewhat unknown vendor.

Key to creating agreements and contracts, planning, problem-solving, as well as managing day-to-day, is being able to think of most of the important things.

1. **Agreements and Contracts** - knowing what to include (especially in specifying the work and processes), as well as issues, changes and contingencies anticipate, is vital to setting the formal basis for managing from a position of control and strength in the relationship.

   And this can really be done only when a member of the project team has worked on the type of project before through its full lifecycle. Ideally this would include an experienced project leader, subject matter expert, and a seasoned Sourcing or Legal professional.

2. **Planning** - having the ability to project a realistic timeline, anticipate likely risks, anticipate changes and problems, forecast costs accurately, handle failures, and recognize ambiguity and uncertainty.

3. **Problem-solving** - taking account of a full set of conditions and factors, knowing what solutions are available, assessing feasibility of alternatives and likely outcomes, then thinking through the best way to implement the solution.

Without experience in these, a team or project leader is really only figuring it out as they go along. And when an external party is involved, one that is being paid and also has their own process and methods, this can be a costly or risky way to run a project.

And if the appropriate thinking capacity is not present, then contracts, plans and solutions will be incomplete and may contain unforeseen risks, flaws and key omissions.

This is why, when drawing up contracts, planning outsourced projects, or solving problems involving vendors, it is best to have experience within the team, as well as the right level and style of thinking to anticipate most things.

A new outsourced project leader (aka "vendor manager") can learn to think of everything (well, at least most of the important stuff). And that project leader will be wise to locate experienced managers, subject matter experts, and other resources who can assist the learning process.

Jim Everett is Principal Partner of Los Angeles based training and consulting firm, Think180, specializing in equipping Project Leaders and teams with the skills and direction to effectively manage outsourced projects and vendors.

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