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Communication as a Leader of a Dynamic Team – General Outline

Outline for Learning Asset: Customer Project Manager – Communication as a Leader of a Dynamic Team

Project / Learning Objectives:

1. Describe team stages: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning.
2. Explain the dynamics of a high-performing team.
3. Foster trust, loyalty, and transparency.
4. Communicate priorities.
5. Encourage open conversations.

Course Title: Customer Project Manager: Communication as a Leader of a Dynamic Team

1. Course Overview
 - a. Importance of Effective Communication in Team Leadership

As experienced project managers, you understand that exceptional leadership is not just about making decisions and guiding the project's direction; it's about creating an environment where success thrives. At the heart of this success lies effective communication.

In this course, we will focus on how everything starts with you, as the leader, and the pivotal role you play in establishing open communication within your team. A culture of openness, trust, and effective dialogue acts as the bedrock for team performance, productivity, and ultimately, project success.

2. Understanding Team Development
 - a. Definition and Purpose of Team Stages
 - i. Forming
 - ii. Storming
 - iii. Norming
 - iv. Performing
 - v. Adjourning

- b. Characteristics and Challenges of Each Stage
- c. Recognizing Signs of Progression through Team Stages

Forming Stage:

Signs of Progression: Team members begin to introduce themselves and get to know one another. They express enthusiasm about the project and its goals.

Behaviors to Observe: Polite and cautious interactions, dependency on the project manager for guidance, uncertainty about roles and responsibilities.

Storming Stage:

Signs of Progression: Team members start expressing their opinions and ideas, even if they differ from others. Conflicts arise, but they are willing to address and resolve them.

Behaviors to Observe: Disagreements and debates over task allocation, decision-making, or approaches. Emergence of leaders and subgroups within the team.

Norming Stage:

Signs of Progression: Team members establish mutual respect and begin to collaborate effectively. They agree on shared goals and norms for communication and decision-making.

Behaviors to Observe: Improved cohesion and cooperation. Development of team rituals or routines to support collaboration.

Performing Stage:

Signs of Progression: The team works cohesively and efficiently towards achieving project objectives. They demonstrate a high level of trust and autonomy in decision-making.

Behaviors to Observe: High levels of task focus, efficient problem-solving, and shared responsibility for outcomes.

Adjourning Stage:

Signs of Progression: The project is successfully completed, and team members express a sense of accomplishment and closure.

Behaviors to Observe: Team members may become more reflective, discussing lessons learned, and expressing appreciation for each other's contributions.

It's important to note that teams don't always progress linearly through these stages. They can regress or loop back to previous stages, especially when facing new challenges or changes. Effective team leaders actively monitor the team's dynamics and are adaptable in their approach to support the team's progression through each stage. They foster open communication, encourage trust, address conflicts constructively, and promote a positive team environment to ensure continuous development and success.

How'd we get here?

The team stages matter to communication because they directly impact the dynamics and effectiveness of how team members interact and collaborate. Understanding the team stages is crucial for project managers and leaders as it enables them to tailor their communication approach, anticipate challenges, and foster a cohesive and productive team environment. Let's explore why the team stages matter to communication:

Forming Stage:

In the Forming stage, team members are relatively new to each other, and they might be uncertain about their roles and responsibilities within the project. Effective communication during this stage is essential to facilitate introductions, build rapport, and set clear expectations. Project managers need to establish open channels of communication and encourage team members to express their ideas and concerns freely.

Storming Stage:

The Storming stage is marked by conflicts, differences of opinion, and power struggles. Team members may challenge each other's ideas, leading to potential breakdowns in communication. Effective communication during this stage involves addressing conflicts constructively, promoting active listening, and facilitating open discussions to reach consensus. The project manager plays a crucial role in mediating conflicts and ensuring that everyone's voice is heard.

Norming Stage:

As the team moves into the Norming stage, they start to find their rhythm, develop trust, and establish norms for communication and decision-making. Effective communication during this stage involves reinforcing the team's values, fostering a collaborative environment, and encouraging regular feedback. The project manager should ensure that open communication channels remain in place and that team members feel comfortable sharing their opinions and ideas.

Performing Stage:

The Performing stage is characterized by a highly productive and cohesive team. Communication during this stage focuses on maintaining alignment, recognizing achievements, and fostering continuous improvement. The project manager should encourage open dialogue, celebrate successes, and facilitate team retrospectives to learn from past experiences.

Adjourning Stage:

As the project concludes and the team transitions into the Adjourning stage, effective communication is crucial to celebrate the team's accomplishments, recognize individual contributions, and discuss lessons learned. The project manager should encourage open reflections, capture valuable insights, and ensure team members feel appreciated for their efforts.

Overall, the team stages provide project managers with a roadmap to understand the team's evolving needs and dynamics. By aligning communication strategies with each stage, leaders can effectively navigate challenges, maintain team morale, and optimize productivity. Being attuned to the team's stage allows the project manager to tailor communication styles, promote trust and transparency, and build a cohesive team that works harmoniously towards project success. Understanding the importance of team stages to communication empowers leaders to create a supportive and productive team environment that fosters collaboration, innovation, and overall project excellence.

3. Building a High-Performing Team

a. Definition and Benefits of a High-Performing Team

- b. Characteristics and Traits of High-Performing Teams
 - c. Role of the Customer Project Manager in Fostering a High-Performing Team
 - d. Strategies for Creating an Environment of Trust, Loyalty, and Transparency
- 4. Effective Communication as a Leader
 - a. Importance of Communication in Team Leadership
 - b. Essential Communication Skills for Customer Project Managers
 - c. Communicating Priorities and Expectations
 - i. Setting Clear Goals and Objectives
 - ii. Defining Roles and Responsibilities
 - iii. Establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - d. Techniques for Encouraging Open Conversations
 - i. Active Listening
 - ii. Providing Constructive Feedback
 - iii. Asking Thought-Provoking Questions
- 5. Designing and Facilitating Engaging Sessions
 - a. Innovative Approaches to Team Collaboration
 - b. Creating an Engaging Learning Environment
 - i. Incorporating Interactive Activities and Exercises
 - ii. Utilizing Technology and Digital Tools
 - c. Promoting Collaboration and Achieving Positive Outcomes
 - i. Facilitating Effective Meetings and Brainstorming Sessions
 - ii. Promoting a Culture of Collaboration and Collective Achievement

Note: This course outline provides a high-level structure for the learning asset "Customer Project Manager: Communication as a Leader of a Dynamic Team." The actual content and learning activities can be further developed in collaboration with the subject matter expert (SME) to align with the specific needs and context of Company's customer project management team.

Questions for SME:

1. Can you provide an example of a team in the norming stage and explain the characteristics of this stage? (LO#1)
2. What are some indicators that a team has reached the performing stage? (LO#1)
3. In your experience, what challenges can arise during the adjourning stage of team development and how can they be addressed? (LO#1)
4. What are the key characteristics of a high-performing team? (LO#2)
5. How does a high-performing team handle conflicts or disagreements? (LO#2)
6. Can you share an example of a high-performing team and explain how their dynamics contributed to their success? (LO#2)
7. How can you build trust within a team? (LO#3)
8. What actions or behaviors can erode trust and transparency in a team? (LO#3)
9. Can you share an experience where fostering loyalty positively impacted the team's performance? (LO#3)

10. How would you effectively communicate priorities to your team? (LO#4)
11. What strategies can you employ to ensure team members understand and align with the priorities? (LO#4)
12. How do you address conflicting priorities within a team? (LO#4)
13. What steps can you take to create an environment where open conversations are encouraged? (LO#5)
14. How do you handle situations where team members are hesitant to speak up during discussions? (LO#5)
15. Can you share an example of a successful open conversation that led to positive outcomes for the team? (LO#5)

Responses to Questions: CLIENT (SME)

QUESTION:

During the initial forming stage when team members are just getting to know each other and the project's objectives, how do you approach communication?

What strategies do you use to facilitate effective communication among team members who might be unfamiliar with each other's working styles and preferences?

ANSWER:

At Company, the approach to **communication** during the initial forming stage varies **depending** on the project's size and type. We adapt our communication efforts to meet the project's specific requirements and needs, which is of utmost importance. These questions touch on crucial aspects of overall **project delivery, project communication, and strategic management**.

In any case, we prioritize doing whatever is necessary to **bring the team together** during the "forming" stage. The **duration** of the project is a critical factor. Some projects might be short-term endeavors, lasting only a few months, while others could span several years, even involving multi-year contracts of five to seven years. For **shorter** projects, the focus on team integration may not be as intense since they involve **smaller** deliverables and may require less **coordination**. On the other hand, for longer projects and large customer accounts, with teams working together for an extended period, it becomes crucial to establish a **robust communication strategy**.

In the past, this would often involve **face-to-face interactions**, like **kickoff** meetings, either internally or with the customer. Nowadays, with more dispersed teams across different cities and time zones due to the prevalence of global teams, we tend to rely more on **remote communication methods**. We aim to conduct as much as possible remotely, using virtual meetings and other communication tools.

Additionally, the chosen project methodology can influence how we approach communication and set the plan for effective collaboration during the initial stage. For instance, if we are using a **waterfall** methodology, we follow more **traditional approaches** like kickoff meetings and frequent team gatherings. However, if we adopt an **agile** methodology, we focus on **basic agile principles**, such as daily **stand-up meetings**, to foster strong team bonds and effective communication throughout the project.

Ultimately, the communication approach and strategy we employ are **tailored** to suit the unique requirements and nature of each project, ensuring efficient teamwork and successful project outcomes, irrespective of the methodology followed.

QUESTION #2a & b:

During the storming stage, conflicts and differences of opinion may arise. How do you promote open communication and ensure that conflicting ideas are addressed **constructively**? As a leader, how do you address communication challenges that may arise during this stage to maintain a positive team dynamic?

ANSWER:

In the storming stage, Company's culture has been instrumental in helping me as a leader. Over my 17 years with the company, starting as an engineer, then a project manager, and now in a leadership role, I've witnessed the consistent emphasis on open conversations within Company's culture. As a leader myself, I actively encourage open communication, **free from concerns about repercussions**. At Company, we have a team of individuals who are **comfortable engaging** in discussions, even when opinions differ.

This **openness** leads to the generation of great ideas and sets a positive precedent for constructive communication. Personally, I haven't encountered significant issues in this area, thanks to the supportive environment at Company.

As a leader, I find it crucial to continually reinforce the importance of open conversation during the storming stage. I make an effort to remind the team about this value repeatedly. For team members who might be more reserved, I **actively encourage** them to voice their thoughts and opinions, striving to reach a consensus collectively.

Company's culture strongly fosters **open communication** and equips us to handle conflicts wisely, ensuring that our team dynamics remain positive and productive.

QUESTION #3a & b:

During the norming stage, team members start establishing group norms and rules. How do you ensure clear communication channels are promoted, and everyone's voice is heard and valued in this phase?

How do you foster a **collaborative** environment that encourages team members to communicate openly and contribute their ideas to enhance team performance?

ANSWER:

I want to reiterate the significance of this point because within a team, we have individuals with different personality types—**extroverts and introverts**. Each person possesses unique **strengths**, even though some may not readily express them. As a leader, it becomes crucial to **actively seek out opinions** from all team members, including those who may be less inclined to speak up. For instance, during engagement pulse surveys or debrief sessions, it's common for a few individuals to be the first to share their thoughts. However, it's part of my responsibility as a leader to encourage participation from others who may have been more reserved, ensuring that their insights are heard and valued.

Over time, by consistently encouraging communication and giving everyone an equal opportunity to contribute, I've observed that team members become more open and willing to share their perspectives. As leaders, it's essential to actively look for these opportunities to involve all team members in discussions.

Creating a collaborative environment is paramount for enhancing team performance. To foster such an environment, I encourage open communication among team members. This includes actively **inviting** and **welcoming** ideas and contributions from all individuals. By establishing a culture where every team member's input is respected and valued, we can harness the power of diverse perspectives to drive the team's success.

As leaders, we play a crucial role in facilitating and promoting communication within the team. By ensuring that everyone feels **heard, appreciated, and empowered** to share their ideas, we can build a cohesive and high-performing team.

QUESTION #4:

In the performing stage, the team is focused on achieving goals efficiently. How do you maintain **effective communication** while allowing the team to work autonomously and make decisions collectively?

What communication strategies do you use to keep the team motivated and aligned towards the successful completion of the project?

ANSWER:

As a leader, I am inherently **data-driven** and **goal-oriented**. Even when I was a project manager, I managed my projects with a strong emphasis on data, goals, and rewarding the team for achieving those objectives.

While our primary focus is on meeting goals, it's equally important to **celebrate** the team's achievements, regardless of whether we meet all our goals or not. To maintain effective communication during the **performing** stage, I utilize a combination of **data and metrics**. I always ensure that relevant metrics are readily **available** at every stage of project delivery. This allows us to measure our performance, set **benchmarks**, and continuously improve over time. By setting clear goals, we can celebrate our successes when we surpass them.

Moreover, empowering the team to work autonomously is vital during this stage. Collective decision-making ensures that each team member's voice is heard, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the project's success. As a leader, I provide guidance and support, stepping in when needed, but also trusting the team to make informed decisions.

To keep the team motivated and aligned towards successful project completion, I place significant emphasis on **maintaining open channels of communication**. Regular **updates**, **progress** reports, and **feedback** sessions are essential to keep everyone on track and motivated. I make sure the team understands the significance of their contributions and the impact of their work on the overall project success.

Having a data-driven approach and clear metrics helps the team visualize their progress and understand how their efforts contribute to the project's overall success. This data-driven feedback loop not only fosters a positive work environment but also helps the team stay motivated and focused on achieving their objectives.

Ultimately, I believe that combining data-driven insights with a collaborative decision-making approach creates a culture of success, where each team member is engaged, motivated, and aligned towards the common goal of efficiently achieving project milestones.

QUESTION #5:

Adjourning Stage:

- a. As a project comes to an end, team members will disband. How do you facilitate effective communication during this stage to ensure a smooth transition and celebrate the team's achievements?
- b. How do you encourage the team to reflect on their communication patterns and interpersonal dynamics throughout the project to foster continuous improvement for future projects?

ANSWER:

Nowadays, as we move more towards agile methodologies, they promote retrospectives where teams share their thoughts not just at the end of a project but after every sprint. I always encourage our project managers to conduct these retrospectives even if they are not strictly following agile. It's crucial to have these reflective meetings at the end of a project.

In the past, I used to tabulate the **feedback** gathered during these retrospectives and analyze what we could do to improve for future projects. The same customer might sign another contract with us, or there could be a contract extension that leads to working with the same team on the next phase. Hence, conducting retrospectives is essential for **continuous improvement**.

Another important aspect during the adjourning stage is **not to become complacent** if the team has achieved great success. As a leader, I emphasize celebrating the team's achievements, but it's equally important to stay grounded. Success should not get to our heads, as we are about to embark on another "forming stage" with new team members, if that's the case.

Maintaining effective communication during the adjourning stage ensures a smooth transition as the team members disband. It allows us to acknowledge and celebrate the team's accomplishments while also providing an opportunity for valuable feedback and insights to carry forward into future projects. Encouraging a culture of **reflection** and **continuous improvement** helps the team grow and perform even better in their future endeavors.

QUESTION #6:

What are the key characteristics of a high-performing team?

ANSWER:

Many of the aspects we have just discussed, such as **open communication** and being **goal-oriented**, contribute to the key characteristics of a high-performing team. Another crucial characteristic is **having each other's back**. This **mutual support** is paramount for the success of a high-performing team. At the end of the day, as long as we can foster such a culture and set ambitious yet achievable goals, the team can thrive.

I must say, I've never encountered significant issues with the type of people we have at Company. In my team meetings, I always start by expressing how great the team is and how proud I am to manage such exceptional individuals. Letting them know that they are among the most **high-performing individuals** I've had the privilege to work with is important. By setting clear goals and working collaboratively to achieve them, we reinforce the team's **dedication** and commitment to excellence.

QUESTION #7:

How does a high-performing team handle conflicts or disagreements?

ANSWER:

A high-performing team approaches conflicts or disagreements with open conversation and respect. It is crucial to foster an environment where team members respect and value each other, regardless of their **seniority** or **level of experience**. Whether a team member has 25 years of industry experience or has just entered the workforce after completing their education, the culture should promote mutual respect and open thinking.

As leaders, it is our responsibility to enable and encourage this culture of respect and open communication. At Company, I have witnessed how beautifully this is done. The company's culture truly supports and facilitates open conversations and mutual respect, allowing high-performing teams to handle conflicts and disagreements in a productive and constructive manner.

QUESTION #9:

How can you build trust within a team?

ANSWER:

With the teams that I manage, one of the most frequent responses I receive during engagement pulse meetings is that "my teammate has my back" or "my team has my back." I take immense pride in this feedback. To **foster trust** within the team, we have implemented a **buddy system** and a **mentor/mentee system**. For instance, if there are two senior individuals or team members at a similar level, we pair them up as buddies. This ensures that even if someone is working on a project **individually**, they have a team member as their **backup**, someone who is aware of their work and can **assist if needed**. This **sharing of tasks** and **support** strengthens the team's bond.

Additionally, for our **junior** team members, we always ensure that there is a **mentor** available within the team whom they can turn to for guidance and help. This mentorship arrangement further enhances trust and promotes a supportive work environment.

The system I've described is specifically in the context of me managing a team of **project managers**. However, I firmly believe that the same approach works beautifully within individual projects as well. When I was a project manager, we had senior and junior engineers, and we actively implemented a mentor/mentee or buddy system. This created a sense of **camaraderie and trust** among team members as they got to know and support each other.

In conclusion, building trust within a team is achievable by establishing such **support systems**, fostering **collaboration**, and **encouraging** team members to have each other's backs. This ultimately leads to a cohesive and high-performing team.

QUESTION #10:

What actions or behaviors can erode trust and transparency in a team?

ANSWER:

I believe it all starts with the leader. A leader must foster an open culture within the team. Different individuals may have varying **priorities** and values, and it's essential to recognize and respect those differences.

One significant aspect that can erode trust and transparency is when leaders keep important matters, such as **promotions** or **general recognition**, **secretive**. This behavior is something I strongly discourage.

To prevent the erosion of **trust** and **transparency**, it's vital to establish an environment where everything is open and transparent. Team members should feel that they are part of a

collaborative effort and that they support each other. A leader's personality and traits play a crucial role in reflecting this **openness**. Nothing should be hidden from the team.

By nurturing a culture of **open communication and transparency**, a team can avoid situations where individuals start feeling uncertain about whether they are receiving the recognition they deserve. When people begin to doubt whether they are missing out on acknowledgment due to a lack of open discussions, it can lead to a **breakdown of trust** within the team.

In summary, a leader's commitment to creating an open and transparent environment is instrumental in preventing trust erosion within the team. When team members feel valued and informed, trust and collaboration thrive, contributing to a healthier and more successful team dynamic.

QUESTION #17:

Can you share an example of a successful open conversation that led to positive outcomes for the team?

ANSWER:

I can recall a fantastic conversation with my team during a time when Company was transitioning from a "**work from home**" environment to a "**hybrid**" environment. As leaders, we were tasked with setting up team meetings and conducting small **workshops** to gather input on **how** we wanted to function as a team in the new setup. During these discussions, I noticed that certain individuals seemed hesitant and reluctant about the shift from a remote work setup to a "return to office" or a "hybrid environment."

Using the framework provided by Company, we were able to **facilitate open and candid** conversations. It was heartening to witness the positive outcomes that followed. The team members expressed their happiness and satisfaction with the meeting, highlighting how engaging and beneficial it was in terms of **getting to know** each other better. The session turned out to be a resounding success.

What made the conversation even more remarkable was that the meeting, initially scheduled for 45 minutes, extended for about an hour and a half. Despite my offers for anyone to leave if they had other commitments, no one chose to depart. The team was incredibly **engaged** and **enthusiastic** throughout the entire discussion.

This open and successful conversation **contributed** significantly to our team's smooth **transition** to the new working environment. It fostered a sense of unity and understanding among team members, enabling us to embrace the changes with positivity and enthusiasm.