Restoring a Failing Project to Health

Background

The client is a major UK consumer finance provider based in South East England.

A project, with around 45 staff, was performing the analysis, specification and execution of application changes. The project was part of a combined systems migration and "Y2K" programme. The migration was of legacy applications from Amdahl to CMOS hardware. Most coding activity was outsourced to a company based in India with the local resources focusing on analysis and specification.

Despite reports and claims to the contrary, an Earned Value analysis of the project indicated that it was behind schedule and threatening the overall programme schedule and a £300,000 cost overrun on a budget of £4 million.

What We Did

Close analysis of the schedule indicated that the project was indeed in danger of significant overrun. The challenge was identifying the cause of the delays because individual activities and deliverables generally appeared to be progressing well.

We held a series of interviews with individual workstream leaders and other influential members of the project team, including the outsourced resources provider.

In order to obtain the views of all project staff we also undertook a wide ranging survey. The survey covered the whole of the project and environment (from rating the project manager to the quality of the lavatory facilities) in order to obtain an open and comprehensive view of the project. The survey sought both the current ("as is") and desirable or recommended ("future") state views of the participants.

Combining the interview findings and survey results we identified a number of failings that were impacting the success of the project.

➢ Workstream (team) leaders were not communicating adequately with project staff about the work they were assigning to them. Furthermore, team members did not fully understand their role within the overall programme.

➢ Fault reports on tested deliverables were inadequate, leading to significant further analysis work before faults were fixed. Fault incidence was also high.

➢ Timesheets were not being completed correctly leading to incorrect progress reporting.

➢ Many project team members were dissatisfied with some aspects of the office environment; this was having a demoralising effect.

Analysis revealed that the root cause of many of the problrms lay in the fact that workstream (team) leaders were not experienced in the role, despite having been provided to the project in this capacity.

We agreed an action plan with the Programme Director to address both the current issues and the way forward for the project in order for it to meet its original schedule and budget. The plan included:

➢ Instigating a regular series of programme, project and team level briefings to ensure all staff understood the programme and their role within it.

➢ Preparing and executing a training workshop for the workstream leaders to address communications, task assignment and related team leading skills. The workshop was underpinned with ongoing mentoring of the team leaders.

➢ Implementing a tighter QA regime to review deliverables such as specifications before submitting them to offshore developers.

➢ Establishing a revised fault logging and resolution process and assigning a suitably robust member of the project team to manage this process thereby removing the responsibility from team leaders.

➢ Revising SLAs and communications processes with the outsource provider.

➢ Negotiating with Facilities Management to make a number of changes to improve the working environment.

➢ Replanning the remainder of the project and diverting additional work to the offshore supplier in order to return the project to its original schedule.

Results

➢ Earned Value analysis for the project quickly showed it to be returning to schedule and budget.

➢ Fault incidence was reduced by over 50%.

➢ The project survey was rerun and showed improved scores in all aspects with significant improvement in the targeted aspects. Team perception of "project chances of success" rose from 68% to over 90%.

➢ The project was successfully completed within the original schedule and budget having recouped its early losses.