Discussing commitment

Evaluating with attention to personal commitment

Everyone considers evaluating important, yet it often happens only sparingly. In a background article we explain why and give tips. With this exercise we hope to give you practical inspiration for also discussing personal commitment (or the lack of it).

Commitment from everyone involved is one of the most important factors for bringing your project to a good end, successfully and with enjoyment. A team in which everyone commits fully and takes and shows shared ownership can take flight. Yet there are often good reasons why colleagues or other team members do not commit fully. It is important to discuss this and to state this starting point explicitly.

PURPOSE	Learning together from the past phase and identifying the lessons and points for improvement for the coming phase or future projects. And, in doing so, discussing personal commitment 'without assigning blame'.
WHEN	At an interim evaluation of the past phase or at the end of the project.
WITH WHOM	The whole project team. Ask a process facilitator, such as a PDC facilitator, to guide the meeting. As project manager you can then take an active part yourself; after all, you are part of the team too.
HOW LONG	Set aside an hour for it.
WHAT YOU NEED	A large sheet or flip charts, thick markers in different colours, round stickers.



HOW TO GO ABOUT IT

1. **Start with a good check-in.** Evaluating can feel quite vulnerable. Pay attention to this before you begin. Explain the purpose clearly: learning together from the previous phase and improving the approach for the next phase or the next project. Make agreements about the atmosphere in which you want to discuss commitment, for example with the Team Spirit exercise. In this evaluation it is especially important that everyone speaks openly; make agreements about this beforehand.
2. **Explain what commitment is.** Someone has commitment when he or she wants to contribute (motivation), is able to contribute (qualities) and also has the room to do so (time). It is only natural that this does not always fully work out. So together you explore how things stood with commitment in the different phases,

and how it could have been better.

3. **Draw the graphs.** Put up a large sheet and draw two axes: horizontally the period you want to evaluate, vertically a scale for commitment. Give everyone a thick marker and invite everyone to draw their personal graph.

   Tip: ask everyone to really do this for themselves and not to respond to each other yet.

4. **Discuss the results.** Start with a general round of first reactions: what strikes you? Then look at and discuss each line separately. Encourage the others to keep asking questions with curiosity, and refer to the agreements on the atmosphere if needed.

   Tip: first ask the other participants: what are you most curious about? This helps the person presenting to bring more focus to his or her story.

5. **Prioritise and choose.** Let the team choose the points that are most important for formulating lessons and/or improvements. For example, give everyone a few round stickers to place on a part of the graphs.

6. **Formulate lessons and improvements.** Have participants make proposals in pairs or small groups. Have them write these down concisely and legibly on flip charts or large sticky notes. The more concrete the better: who should do what, and when?

   Tip: sometimes it turns out that something still needs to be discussed between two team members or within part of the team. Make room for this in your programme and schedule one or more rounds for these conversations on the spot.

7. **Discuss the proposals.** Have each group explain its proposals and check with the team where additions are needed. Make sure the proposals are concrete and end up where they will be used in practice. Otherwise they all too often disappear into a folder, never to be found again. Where possible, take a decision on the proposals.

Good luck!

NOTES

APPENDIX: STATEMENTS PER GROUP OF SUCCESS FACTORS

Do you want to discuss commitment more broadly, or also look at the other groups of success factors? You can use these statements for the evaluation and work them into the exercise.

THEY – ENVIRONMENT

THEME	STATEMENT
Agreement	There was agreement between the sponsor and the project manager on the project contract.
Clients/users	The satisfaction of clients/users with the project results as they were realised was the guiding principle. That is why they have been closely involved from the start of the project.
Sponsorship	The sponsor / the sponsoring system was/were passionate about 'their' project, able in their role, authorised to take decisions and available to the project manager where needed.
Value	In advance, we made explicit and weighed the added value of the results and effects of the project (for example with a business case or cost-benefit analysis).
Prioritisation	There was clear prioritisation between the project and its sub-projects, and in relation to other work. This came about through a transparent process in which we applied unambiguous criteria.
Embedding	The project objectives are explicitly linked to strategic organisational objectives. Everyone involved was aware of the relationship between the two.
Line organisation	The line managers involved who supplied capacity for the project were sufficiently informed and behaved as full contract partners.
Arena	Line managers settle their differences of interest among themselves. Project team members do not have to fight for the interests of their own manager in the project team.

I – COMMITMENT

THEME	STATEMENT
Choice	The project manager and team members had the opportunity to choose for themselves the kind of work they contribute to. They were encouraged and challenged to do so.
Creativity	Project managers and team members were given plenty of room to shape for themselves the way the project is approached.
Expertise	There was attention and room for developing the project manager, support staff and project team members in the field of project management.
Commitment	We took the commitment of everyone directly involved in the project seriously and regularly asked each other about it.
Reciprocity	There was attention and room for the team members' own professional and personal development.
Escalating	The project manager and other leads did not muddle on when problems arose, but asked for help in time and escalated when needed.
Project manager	The project manager knows his or her own qualities and limitations. The project manager is strong, commands respect from sponsors, line managers and team members, and actively maintains equal relationships with them.

WE – COLLABORATION

THEME	STATEMENT
Team composition	When putting together the project team(s), we paid attention not only to skills and knowledge, but also to the personal match between the project and the employee.

THEME	STATEMENT
Working together	Project team members worked together intensively to shape the project. For this they used Project Startups (PSUs) and other joint working sessions.
Agreements	In project teams we made agreements about how we treat each other and about the collaboration we wanted.
Team development	We made our collaboration open to discussion. We respected each other's differences and qualities and worked together harmoniously. Where necessary and appropriate, we made use of tools such as Insights, Belbin, MBTI or Management Drives.
Ground rules	We explicitly described the roles, tasks, responsibilities and authorities in the project organisation. The same goes for unambiguous ground rules for the collaboration between sponsor, contractor, team member, capacity supplier, steering committee, and so on. Everyone also kept to them.
Force field	Project teams regularly analyse the force field around their project and actively intervene in it.
Learning	We evaluated the project on aspects defined in advance, both during and after the project. We consciously used the results of these evaluations to improve future performance.

IT – STRUCTURE

THEME	STATEMENT
Methodology	We use a specific project management method that suits the project and our organisation.
Consistent use	We used the same language, the same conceptual framework and the same instruments from the project management method.
Contract	The project had an up-to-date project contract. It contained an unambiguous and clear project definition or business case, an activity plan, a control section covering time, money, quality, organisation, information and communication, and a plan for managing risks.
Time	We had a clear schedule, which was always up to date. As a result, the project was delivered around the agreed deadline.
Money	The project had an adequate budget, and spending against it was tracked. The organisation was therefore 'in control' on this aspect. As a result, the project was delivered within budget.
Quality	For each result or subdeliverable we set quality standards in advance, together with a method for testing against them. Before delivery, we tested the results and subdeliverables against the standards and approved them.
Reporting	We reported systematically, effectively and unambiguously on the progress of the projects. To this end, we agreed in advance on the frequency and form of the reports.
Capacity	Before the project, we estimated the input required from staff and made sure they could actually spend this time on the project.