

ITHS Team Science Boot Camp

Lean Project Management

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“John was supposed be representing his entire group at our meetings, but he hasn’t given any feedback except his own.” “I don’t trust Sally; she never gets her work done.” “Jessie only cares about her own career.” These are just a few common complaints team members will make about each other. Common complaints about team members includeⁱ:

- Competing or lack of goals
- Misunderstanding of job responsibilities
- Misunderstanding of requirements
- Interdependence
- Lack of feedback mechanism
- Fear of failure and blaming culture
- Behavioral and personal styles
- Failure to follow team norms

While these issues often lead to relationship issues, they begin as process issues. Issues that the world of Lean and Project Management have been addressing for years. Lean (also referred to as Continuous improvement or Agile in software development) is a process of continuously adding value and removing waste. At its core, Lean requires people to work together to build solutions and Lean focuses on bringing value to the end-users or “customers”. At its roots Lean began in the late 1980’s and focused on a Japanese organization, Toyotaⁱⁱ. Since then, Lean has spread into Healthcare, service industries and software development (under the name of Agile). Lean has created several interventions and tools that focus on effectively and efficiently working in teams.

Project Management is defined by the combination of the two title words by the Project Management Institute. Project refers to a temporary body of work that has a defined beginning and end time. It is unique in that it is not a routine operation. Management refers to the functions of organizing, planning, controlling and directing resources. Project management is then the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to meet project requirements.ⁱⁱⁱ

Combining lean and project management gives access to an abundance of resources that focus on creating an effective team, dedicated to meeting the needs of their “customers” and creating interventions and solutions that meet the project (or study) requirements.

These tools focus on creating a clear and aligned problem statement and goal. All team members buy into and understand this goal, replacing competition with alignment where the sum of the team builds towards the end goal. Goals are translated into outputs and outcomes and project requirements. These requirements further

direct both the work to be done and the prioritization of the work. Based on the work to be done, team members break the project down into bodies of work and then into tasks. Tasks that are dependent on other tasks are clearly linked- making dependencies visible to the entire team. Work responsibilities and time expectations are clearly defined. Team members are identified based on the skills and knowledge that they bring to the team and their overarching responsibilities are clearly defined. If they are representing groups of individuals, this is articulated. The clarity of responsibilities is the first step in creating an environment where team members can be successful. Tools are used to define the desired team agreements which build into team norms that have been clearly stated. Communication plans provide consideration of audience, message, delivery method, frequency and timing, responsibilities for message development and delivery.

While these are all tools and processes, it becomes clear how they can impact the interpersonal relationships of team members. Reflecting on the scenarios above, John didn't realize that he was brought into the team to represent the broader views of his research coordinators. Once he became aware of this role, he was able to use his department meetings to gather input on specific issues. Once Sally's work was clearly identified and due dates were agreed upon, she was able to manage her work to meet the expectations of the team. This became much easier to do when time frames were discussed. Jessie does care about her career, as does Sally and John. They now understand the goal of this study, their roles, how they will benefit. This can lead to clarity around publications and authorship roles and placements. They can discuss ways that the study might link to future studies. Issues that were rapidly becoming relationship challenges have been addressed through process tools developed through Lean Project Management.

ⁱ Goodman, Rick. "What Causes Conflict On Your Team?" *Business 2 Community*, 30 June 2015, www.business2community.com/crisis-management/causes-conflict-team-01262953.

Common Causes of Team Conflict, oer2go.org/mods/en-boundless/www.boundless.com/management/textbooks/boundless-management-textbook/groups-teams-and-teamwork-6/managing-conflict-55/common-causes-of-team-conflict-277-3941/index.html.

Elorus Team. "Common Workplace Conflicts Explained: Reasons, Types and Signs." *Elorus Blog*, 6 Nov. 2019, www.elorus.com/blog/causes-of-common-workplace-conflicts-explained/.

ⁱⁱ Virginia, Maria, and Claudiu Vasile. "Lean Manufacturing: The When, The Where, The Who." doi:10.1107/s0108768107031758/bs5044sup1.cif.

ⁱⁱⁱ "What Is Project Management?" *PMI*, www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management.