Information Pack

Unit: 401

Planning & Leading a Complex Team Activity

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this unit is to enable you to plan and lead a complex team activity which will demonstrates leadership skills

It is vital for efficient and effective planning and leadership for satisfactory completion of complex team activities. One of the most well-worn phrases you will hear in organisations when dealing with complex situations is 'we don't have enough time'- to which the reply (or response) is more than likely to be ‘work harder!' Working harder can lead to diminishing returns, frustration, over-work and stress and, ultimately, burnout. There is considerable truth in the phrase 'time costs money' and if we are to be effective as managers, we need to have the skills to plan our own use of time and resources and that of our staff especially when dealing with complex team activities. Developing techniques to plan for better use of time, to prioritise well and allocate work to the right people with the right skills will be fundamental to success in planning and leading complex team activities.

In this unit you will demonstrate how you will plan for and communicate the purpose, aims and measurable objectives for a complex team activity. You will consider resources necessary, taking any operational constraints into consideration. You will be required look at the process of producing a correct and appropriate implementation plan for the activity, assessing operational or safety issues that apply.

You will provide evidence of you presenting information on the activity to your team: this will include inviting questions, responding appropriately to questions, and communicating roles and responsibilities to team members.

Finally, you will review own ability to lead a team through a complex activity by using a combination of feedback from team members and leadership theory or practice to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your performance. You are then required to produce a self-development plan based on feedback and a self-assessment to improve own planning and leadership skills.

GUIDANCE

This document is prepared to break the unit material down into bite size chunks. You will see the learning outcomes above treated in their own sections. Therein you will encounter the following structures;

Purpose

Explains *why* you need to study the current section of material. Quite often learners are put off by material which does not initially seem to be relevant to a topic or profession. Once you understand the importance of new learning or theory you will embrace the concepts more readily.

Theory

Conveys new material to you in a straightforward fashion. To support the treatments in this section you are strongly advised to follow the given hyperlinks, which may be useful documents or applications on the web.

Example

The examples/worked examples are presented in a knowledge-building order. Make sure you follow them all through. If you are feeling confident then you might like to treat an example as a question, in which case cover it up and have a go yourself. Many of the examples given resemble assignment questions which will come your way, so follow them through diligently.

Question

Questions should not be avoided if you are determined to learn. Please do take the time to tackle each of the given questions, in the order in which they are presented. The order is important, as further knowledge and confidence is built upon previous knowledge and confidence. As an Online Learner it is important that the answers to questions are immediately available to you. Contact your Unit Tutor if you need help.

Challenge

You can really cement your new knowledge by undertaking the challenges. A challenge could be to download software and perform an exercise. An alternative challenge might involve a practical activity or other form of research.

Video

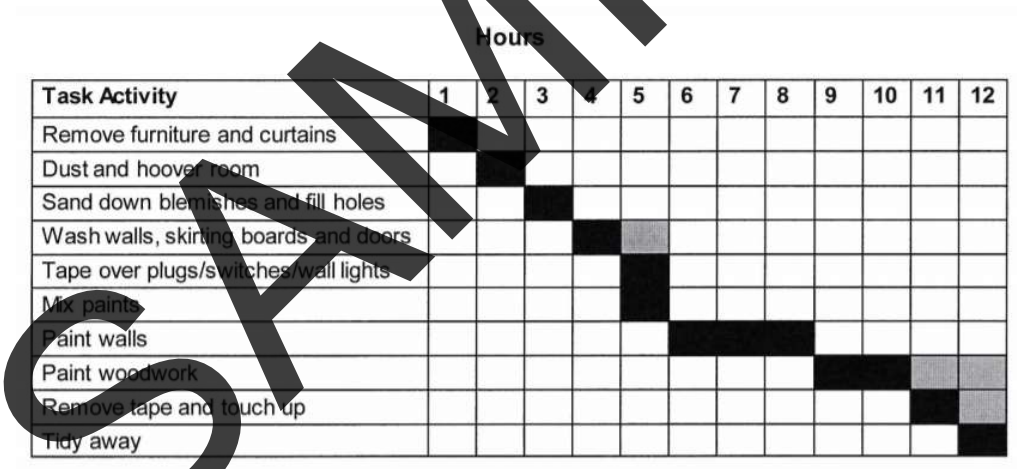
Videos on the web can be very useful supplements to your distance learning efforts. Wherever an online video(s) will help you then it will be hyperlinked at the appropriate point.

Contents

Two of the most popular planning tools, used extensively in project and change management, are the GANTT Charts and Network Diagrams

GANTT Charts

GANTT Charts are extremely useful project management tools. The GANTT Chart is named after US engineer and consultant Henry Gantt (1861-1919) who devised the technique in the 1910s. GANTT charts are excellent tools for scheduling. They also can be developed to include budget information and are easy to use for reporting, presenting and communicating project plans and progress. As a rule, GANTT Charts are not as good as a Critical Path Analysis Flow Diagram for identifying and showing interdependent factors, or for 'mapping' a plan from and/or into all of its detailed causal or contributing elements. You can construct a GANTT Chart using MS Excel or a similar spreadsheet. Every activity has a separate line. Create a timeline for the duration of the project (the breakfast example below shows hours, but normally you would use day, or weeks, or, for very big long-term projects, months). You can colour code the time blocks to denote the type of activity (for example, intense, watching brief, directly managed, delegated and left-to-run.) You can schedule reviews and insert break points. At the end of each line you can show as many cost columns for the activities as you need.



GANTT Chart Example – Decorating a Room (K Hamilton, 2009)

In the example above, the bold black blocks represent actual work or activity, while the grey shading indicates, in this case, drying time after washing and painting of woodwork.

Project Evaluation and Review Technique - Network Diagrams

A second commonly used planning technique is Project Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT). PERT is a specialised method for identifying related and interdependent activities and events within a project. While PERT is not normally relevant in simple projects, any project or activity of considerable size and complexity,

particularly when timings and interdependency issues are crucial, can benefit from the detailed analysis enabled by PERT methods. PERT analysis commonly feeds into what is known as Critical Path Analysis. Critical Path Analysis sounds very complicated, but it is simply a very logical and effective method for planning and managing complex projects and activities. A critical path analysis is normally shown as a flow diagram, whose format is linear (organised in a line), and specifically a timeline. The Critical Path is defined as 'the longest route through the project'; that is, the total time that it will take for the longest sequence in time of interdependent events/activities to complete. Critical Path Network diagrams are very good for showing interdependent factors where timings overlap or coincide. They also enable a plan to be scheduled according to a timescale. Taking, as an example, a project to organise a family party, we can undertake a Critical Path Analysis and prepare a Network Diagram. We know what activities are involved: identifying a venue, booking a venue, booking catering and entertainment, inviting family and friends to attend, ordering a cake, decorating the room and clearing up. Some of these activities can happen in parallel and some are interdependent. That is to say, if the organiser (project manager) tried to book catering before the number of attendees was known, it could be a very costly mistake! Similarly, certain tasks must be started before others, and certain tasks must be completed in order for others to begin. For example, the venue must be booked before invitations can be sent out and, obviously, we cannot clear up until after the party.

Safety Requirements

Managing Risk in any complex activity it is essential to assess the situation with consistent review as things could go wrong or not as planned, either through omission (we forget to do something or fail to anticipate a potential problem), or, commission (we do something that we should not). These occurrences are collectively known as 'risks' risk can be defined as:

'A chance or possibility of danger loss, injury or other adverse consequences'

(Concise Oxford Dictionary)

'An uncertainty of outcome'

(PRTNCE2)

Anticipating risk will be the difference between a well-managed complex team activity and a failed and costly activity, anticipating risk and planning for contingencies is key. Typically, there are 2 categories of risk on any project: business risk and project risk. A business risk is a risk that will affect day-to-day or future business, while a project risk is one that is specific to (and will only affect) the process change project. For example, a company announces that it is going to trade online from a specific date and then fails to have the web technology available on the launch date. The loss of anticipated sales is both a business and project risk while the adverse impact upon its reputation is simply a business risk. The loss of anticipated sales will adversely affect the annual sales figures - the business risk - while the delayed