The Ethical Dimension of Project Management

Hildur Helgadóttir, MPM
Landspítaли – Reykjavík

Abstract—The focus of project management has traditionally been on developing new methods to run projects efficiently; within the time schedule and on budget while not compromising on quality. In later years the focus has shifted more towards leadership issues because there is growing consensus that the greatest challenge in project management is managing people. As project management evolves it is faced with all the debating into the project manager’s toolbox.

A comprehensive review of the literature is followed by an action oriented approach where project management assignments of 32 MPM students were investigated before, during and after an intensive course in ethics and leadership …

www.mpm.is
Health care and ethics

- Nurses
- Physicians
- Physical therapists
- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Dentists
- Midwives
- Nutritionists
- Occupational therapists
- etc

The Hippocratic oath

Project Management

- Performance
- Cost
- Time
Meredith&Mantel, 5th ed, p.65

“Risk analysis does not remove the ambiguity, it simply describes the uncertainties in a way that provides the decision maker with a useful insight into their nature”

New version ...

“Ethical risk analysis does not remove the ambiguity, it simply describes the uncertainties in a way that provides the decision maker with a useful insight into their nature”
Why ethics and project management?

- The objectives of the project,
- The stakeholders,
- The risks,
- The project team
- The effect of the project on people, organizations, environment, politics, power, warfare, equality, freedom and prosperity
Assumption

The modern day, well educated and responsible project manager must possess the knowledge and skills to be able to discern and debate ethical issues.

Question

Which teaching methods might prove useful in order to help incorporate the skills of ethical thinking and debating into the project manager’s toolbox?
Literature review


The group

- First year MPM students
- College education, considerable work experience
Teaching ethics in PM – step 1

Pick several ethics theories that highlight different ways of discussing ethical issues, taking ethical stands and making decisions based on a theoretical framework.

Teaching ethics in PM – step 2

Use ethical dilemmas or vignettes to stimulate the discussion and highlight different possible approaches to making a decision.
Teaching ethics in PM – step 3

Ethical dissection of project plans

Step 1

Pick several ethics theories that highlight different ways of thinking about ethical issues, taking ethical stands and making decisions based on a theoretical framework
Step 2

Use ethical dilemmas or vignettes to stimulate the discussion and highlight different possible approaches to making a decision.

Table 1. Four theories of ethics in one sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virtue ethics</strong></td>
<td>Always act in such a way that you as a project manager will be happy with yourself, your conduct and the project you are responsible for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utilitarianism</strong></td>
<td>Always act in such a way that your actions as a project manager will lead to what is best for as many people as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deontology</strong></td>
<td>Always act in such a way that your actions as a project manager can become a universal law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural rights theory/social contract</strong></td>
<td>Always act in such a way that your actions as a project manager are in the context of and respectful of others' rights and duties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical dilemma

Step 3

Ethical dissection of project plans
The Assignment

- Define the ethical issues embedded in your current project
- Discuss your current project from four ethical viewpoints:
  o Virtue ethics
  o Utilitarianism
  o Deontology
  o Natural rights theory
- Specifically address the following parts of the project plan:
  o Project selection
  o Project objectives
  o Project deliverables
  o Stakeholders
  o Risk analysis
  o Project execution
  o Project management
- Identify the ethical implications of your project for the project team and for owners and the whole of society
- Present one ethical dilemma based on your project (real or hypothetical)

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas

PM dilemmas
PM vignette - example

John is a project manager for developing a website for a new financial company ... John develops a project plan and presents it to the board which then approves the plan except for the part pertaining to access for the blind and visually impaired. ... it is highly unlikely that this group has money to invest ... John is upset over this attitude; he himself has a blind son and is well aware of legislation banning discrimination against minority groups, which does not include this. The board tells him that ... he is free to do the necessary work at his own expense. What are John's options?

Recommendations

1. Teaching students to analyze their own work from an ethical perspective by providing them with a conceptual framework is an effective, valuable hands-on-experience that students enjoy and find helpful and enlightening.
Recommendations

2. Having students develop their own vignettes or ethical dilemmas based on their various experiences seems to be an avenue that needs more exploring.

Recommendations

3. Professional project management associations should develop ethical codes and guidelines and provide educational opportunities in ethics.
Recommendations

4. Academic PM programmes need to design innovative ways to add ethical competence to the project managers’ toolbox

5. Risk analysis tools need to be expanded to allow for ethical risk analysis
Thank you!