

Boosting Project Manager Retention: Lessons from the Volunteering Sector

Authors : Julia Wicker, Alexander Lang

Abstract : The shortage of skilled workers is no longer unique to Europe; Australia now faces similar challenges, particularly in the field of project management. Project managers, essential to the success of a wide range of industries, frequently operate under intense stress and, as a result, may choose to leave their positions before the completion of their projects. This trend poses significant risks to project continuity, budget stability, and the long-term success of organizations. Consequently, it is crucial to explore strategies aimed at improving the retention of project managers, with a specific focus on fostering intrinsic motivation -an essential factor for achieving sustained success and commitment within project-based roles. The aim of this paper is to investigate retention strategies from other industries to identify effective practices that could be adapted to the unique challenges faced by project managers. In particular, the paper draws inspiration from the volunteer sector, an industry also heavily reliant on intrinsic motivation to drive commitment and performance. By examining how the volunteer sector sustains retention through a focus on intrinsic motivation, this paper seeks to highlight potential parallels and offer actionable insights for improving the retention of project managers. The paper includes an overview of the current landscape of retention challenges in project management, highlighting key factors that contribute to early departures and their impacts on organizations. This is followed by an analysis of interviews conducted with both active volunteers and those who have left their roles, leading to the development of a model that categorizes different types of volunteers and explores their behaviours. The model identifies specific reasons for volunteer terminating their assignments and proposes strategies to mitigate these issues. The paper then adapts these volunteer retention strategies to address the challenges faced by project managers, concluding with actionable recommendations for fostering an intrinsically motivated and resilient project management workforce. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to broader efforts in mitigating skilled workforce shortages by offering sustainable retention strategies.

Keywords : skilled workforce shortages, retention challenges in project management, retention strategies in the volunteering sector, retention strategies for project managers

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