THE DYNAMICS OF HIGH TECH PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project manager in the high tech industry is a very dynamic role that enables you to work with interesting people, products, and technologies. Within Alten, Bernard Venemans is responsible for the project management at the internal project delivery center. In addition, he works as a consultant/project manager for a client. A typical week reveals the diversity of projects and activities.

Bernard Venemans

The Alten Delivery Center (ADC) is our in-house organization for project and competence outsourcing. Within the ADC, we run different types of projects, eg application development, scientific modelling, electronics and firmware design. Some of these assignments are stand-alone projects, while others are subprojects (often in the form of Scrum teams) as part of a larger development program at the client.

Monday

Every Monday morning, we start with a management meeting discussing all ADC projects in our Capelle office. Input is a traffic light summary with the status of each project. During the meeting, we talk about the progress, budget and main risks of the projects and any upcoming changes to the assigned consultants. This week, we discuss the possible candidates for a scientific project that needs expansion with a full-stack developer.

In the afternoon, I have my monthly meeting with the financial controller. During this meeting, we discuss the financial status of the fixed-price projects. For other projects, we generate hours and invoice overviews. I use the afternoon to process the results and make a forecast and financial report for several projects. Even though many of these projects are executed iteratively using an Agile methodology, the financial information is still important to the stakeholders to gain insight in the total expected project costs compared to the available budget.

Tuesday

Next to my activities at the Alten Delivery Center, I'm working as a consultant twice a week at Applus+ in the role of project manager. Applus+ is an international testing and inspection services company. At their R&D department, I'm managing a project to develop equipment for advanced ultrasonic testing. Ultrasonic testing uses high-frequency sound energy to perform examinations, which are used for flaw detection and thickness measurements in pipelines. The development of the new equipment requires a multidisciplinary approach using electronics, mechanics, physics and (application) software.

As the equipment will be used in many different regions in the world, an international group of expert users has been established to oversee the system requirements and design. Today, I've planned a meeting with the user group to discuss the required features for the new application soft-

Photo: Applus+

Using ultrasonic testing equipment (of a previous generation) to inspect a weld.


Photo: Annemarie van Vugt

ware's first major release. Based upon an analysis of the workflow and various types of inspections, we've drafted a prioritized feature list. During the meeting, the expert users provide valuable information about which aspects are critical during the most common types of inspections. Based upon this feedback, we decide to change some of the priorities and update our feature backlog accordingly.

Wednesday

Today, I have a progress meeting at Applus+ for the hardware development. The design of one of the PCBs is ready for production and we discuss the required steps for the next couple of days to send the information to the manufacturing company. Next, we review the latest design of the housing. We discuss the various options for the look and feel and the required protection for one the connector types. After the meeting, I work on the minutes by summarizing the decisions and action items.

Thursday

I'm back in the office at Alten. In the morning, we have a planning meeting for one of our internal projects. The goal of this project is to develop a monitoring application for train control systems that runs on a built-in display in public transport vehicles. The scope of the project is defined in detail since we're building an exact replacement for the existing application that runs on obsolete hardware. The main focus is the short project timeline. I'm fortunate to work with a very enthusiastic project team that enjoys this challenge.

During the sprint planning, we select the work packages for the next iteration based upon the overall project phasing as discussed with the client and the main technical challenges that remain. Later that day, I prepare a project dashboard and send it to the client. The dashboard gives an overview of the current progress in the work packages, the expected delivery date, the financial status and the main project risks.

Friday

The last day of the week is also at Alten. In the morning, I have a regular progress meeting with the customer of the train monitoring application. We start with a demonstration of the current state of the project. Next, we go through all aspects in the dashboard I sent out the day before. We have a short discussion about the various options to update the application on the built-in display using a service laptop. We decide that some of the options need further technical investigation.

After the meeting, I have a short talk with the I-See project team. In this project, we've developed firmware, apps and a cloud solution for smart glasses. The project is almost completed, and we only have some support activities left. The rest of the day, I have some informal discussions about the other ADC projects and update their status in the traffic light summary for next week.

After an exciting, dynamic week with a variety of projects and activities, we end the day with a short drink to celebrate the progress made and the start of the weekend.

Bernard Venemans is a project manager at Alten, a multinational technology consulting and engineering company with offices in Capelle aan den IJssel, Eindhoven, Apeldoorn and Amstelveen.

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