Applied Software Project Management

Managing an Outsourced Project
Prevent Project Failure

- Don’t be a hands-off client
- Constantly communicate project goals
  - The vendor’s goals always differ from the clients
  - Don’t expect the team to ignore the vendor’s goals
  - Work with the team to establish the goals of the project as an equal or greater priority
- Transparency is especially important in an outsourced project.
Estimate the Work

- Vendors often estimate the work as part of contract negotiation
  - This happens before the team is assigned.
  - When the project team is assembled, it may be necessary to re-estimate the work.
  - Unrealistic estimates cause projects to fail.
Actively Manage the Project

- A hands-off project manager is usually surprised when the software is delivered
  - And the surprise is never a pleasant one.
- It’s not enough to just have weekly status meetings with no follow-up
  - Project managers need to know the team.
  - Just like an in-house project!
The Vendor’s Management

- Build a relationship with the vendor’s management
  - If they don’t support the project manager’s goals or trust his decisions, the project will likely fail.
  - Don’t allow the vendor’s escalation process to interfere with the project.
  - Make sure the management at the vendor recognizes and rewards good work.
The Project Team

- Build a relationship with the team
  - A project manager doesn’t have the same kind of relationship with the team that he would with a team in his own organization.
  - The project manager isn’t always right! The team does not report to him.
  - Gain credibility by making good decisions.
Collaborate With the Vendor

- Plan and manage the project scope
  - The project starts with a scope and a budget.
    - As opposed to an in-house project, which starts with a set of known resources.
  - Plan for knowledge transfer.
  - Recognize that success for the project manager and success for the vendor are often two different things.
Maintain Tracking and Oversight

- Don’t depend on the vendor to maintain the project plan and project schedule
  - When a project manager is responsible for the project, he must keep track of its status himself.

- Hold reviews and inspections
  - Use a collaborative inspection process that has been optimized for outsourced projects.
Design and Programming

- Don’t delegate the entire design and programming of the project to the vendor
  - Establish design constraints early on.
  - If possible, design the software in-house, or in collaboration with the vendor.
  - Monitor the code base using code reviews and project automation.
Software Quality

- Take responsibility for the quality of the software
  - Quality is not just another deliverable that can be bought and paid for.
  - Don’t make decisions that undercut the QA team.
  - Ensure that adequate time and budget is allocated for test planning and execution.
Don’t Blindly Trust the Vendor

- Even though individual team members may have certifications or degrees, it doesn’t mean that they are competent.
- Just because the vendor’s organization is certified, that doesn’t guarantee that they know better than you do how to run your project.
- Don’t be intimidated by the vendor’s pedigree. If something on the project looks wrong, it probably is!