DECRUITMENT IN PROJECT TEAMS – DETERMINANTS AND WAYS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Anna KRASNOVA

University of Lodz, Department of Human Resources Management, Faculty of Management;
anna.krasnova@uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-2832-2100

Purpose: Decruitment, understood as a multidimensional process of employees downsizing, is little discussed in the literature on project team management. The purpose of this article is to present decruitment as a personnel subfunction in relation to project employees.

Design/methodology/approach: The empirical part presents the results of a qualitative research conducted using the asynchronous interview method with a sample of 133 respondents.

Findings: The results of the research show that decruitment in project teams is understood narrowly and boils down to parting with an employee at the end of a project. Respondents have a comprehensive approach to the way this process is conducted, emphasizing the need to keep a good atmosphere during the parting and to form further relationships.

Research limitations/implications: Most respondents referred in their statements only to decruitment because of project end or project work for which the employee was recruited. Therefore, the research results do not refer to employees leaving during the project, e.g., because of voluntary departures or dismissals. The issue of decruitment in project teams should therefore constitute a further research area.

Practical implications: The results of the research can form the basis for the development of decruitment procedures in project management organizations in relation to the separation of employees after the end of the project.

Originality/value: The article presents the opinions of potential project employees to the process of leaving the employer, which not described so far in the literature on project team management.

Keywords: decruitment, layoffs, quitting the job, project management, project team.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

Introduction

The functioning of project teams and project management are not new concepts in the field of management science. Projects play a key role in today's enterprises (Al-Nabae, Sammani, 2019, p. 1), and working in project teams has been gaining popularity over the years

(Kolodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013, p. 65; Wachowiak, Gregorczyk, 2018, p. 76), evaluating and causing changes in the existing methods of personnel management. The result of these changes includes publications devoted to the general topic of human resource management in project teams (e.g., Szymanska, 2012; Singh, 2014; Kaczmarska-Krawczak, 2013; Frączkowski et al., 2016) and those that extensively discuss such issues as:

- Creation of project teams, thus, among other things, recruitment and selection and selection of project employees (e.g., Kolodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013; Ahsan, Ho, Khan, 2013; Krajewska-Nieckarz, Bialas, 2021).
- Competencies of project employees (e.g., Stor 2013; Wachowiak, Gregorczyk, 2018; Cabala et al., 2020).
- Motivating project team members (e.g., Schmid, 2007; Sroka, 2017).
- Evaluating (e.g., Buklaha, 2010; Yaroslavska, 2010).
- Managing the project team (e.g., Karbownik, 2006; Listwan, 2011).
- The role of the manager in team management (e.g., Klimiuk, 2009; Kisielnicki, 2016; Chmielewiec, 2018).

However, the indicated variety of studies devoted to personnel management in project teams does not refer to one of the personnel sub-functions, which is decruitment. By the term decruitment, the author understands the opposite actions taken in getting employees, the effect of which is a negative change in the quantitative and/or qualitative state of human resources of an organizational unit, in this case a project team.

The revealed cognitive gap shaped the author's interests around the topic of decruitment in project teams with a particular focus on parting with project employees. The purpose of this article is to present decruitment as a personnel sub-function in relation to project teams. Wherever in this publication the author uses the term decruitment, it refers to the situation when a project employee leaves the team during or after the project (through the dissolution of the project team).

Decruitment in project teams – a review of the literature on the subject

The role of the project team and its proper management in the context of successful implementation of project goals has been emphasized more than once in the literature (Szymanska, 2012 p. 148; Kolodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013, p. 73). Problems caused by the destabilization of the project crew can delay the implementation of the project or prevent its completion, and decruitment processes can underlie such problems.

Referring to the Project Management Institute's definition, in which a project is called an activity "undertaken for the purpose of creating a unique product or service" (Klimiuk, 2009, p. 36) and the related definition's characterization of a project team, which indicates that it is

an organizational unit of a temporary nature (Kaczmarska-Krawczak, 2013, p. 51; Krajewska-Nieckarz, Białas, 2021, p. 90), it may seem that decruitment in a project team is a natural phenomenon. Meanwhile, although the dissolution of a project team at the end of a project is a process for which team members should be prepared, the manner in which it takes place is important, among other things, in the context of employer branding of the project organization and from the point of view of recruiting employees for subsequent ongoing projects (Kolodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013, p. 73).

In addition, although the project is a temporary structure, the team may also become destabilized during the project implementation, caused by voluntary departures of employees, dismissals at the initiative of the employer (e.g. in the case of violations or abuses), necessary vertical or horizontal shifts within the project structures, e.g. the employees will lose their rights or they will be dismissed for natural reasons (e.g. when the employee loses the ability to work).

The specificity of project teams assumes that a part of the project team is usually made up of permanent employees, employed for the entire duration of the project (e.g., project manager, project experts), and another part - employees employed for the duration of specific project works or for specific stages of the project. In the conditions of the need to constantly adapt to the constantly changing composition of the workforce of the project, it is difficult for the team to achieve the highest efficiency. When another problem, i.e., unplanned staff turnover (related to unplanned recruitment) becomes noticeable, further problems may arise, e.g., in terms of keeping team spirit, cooperation or knowledge flow (Bushe, 2010). Among the most common problems caused by frequent changes of project team members, the following can be distinguished (Bushe, 2010): loss of knowledge; destabilization of ways of working; decreased involvement; disappearance of the sense of identification with the project team, project, or organization.

A study conducted in the United States, Canada, and Australia on a total sample of 134 project managers revealed that the highest level of rotation of project workers is noticeable during the project implementation phase, and the main reasons for departures include individual reasons for employees related to career building and personal development (Parker, Skitmore, 2005, p. 205). The authors of this study, referring to earlier publications, show that the reasons for leaving the project during its implementation include "difficulty in work", lack of loyalty to the organization, lack of promotion opportunities or lack of a sense of job security (Parker, Skitmore, 2005, p. 2014).

A survey conducted in Poland among 5 managers with experience in managing project teams revealed that the so-called "Continuity of human resources" during the project (Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2013, p. 73), and the emerging staffing gaps, even if they do not last long, may cause many problems, e.g., in the context of work organization or the atmosphere in the team.

An analysis of the literature on project management allows the conclusion that the responsibility for recruitment in the project team should rest on the shoulders of the project manager, as he is responsible, inter alia, for recruiting employees (Szymańska, 2012 p. 148; Kaczmarska-Krawczak, 2013 p. 57; Wachowiak, Gregorczyk, 2018, pp. 79), planning, organizing and coordinating the work of team members (Klimiuk, 2009, p. 36, Kaczmarska-Krawczak, 2013 p. 57; Wachowiak, Gregorczyk, 2018, pp. 78-79), appropriate assessment, motivating and rewarding (Wachowiak, Gregorczyk, 2018, pp. 78-79) and generally understood human resource management in relation to project employees (Klimiuk, 2009, pp. 41; Szymańska, 2012, p. 148).

However, there is no list of procedures or framework activities that a project manager should undertake in recruitment procedures. The author of the article is of the opinion that the exploration of the phenomenon of recruitment in relation to project teams will not only fill the cognitive gap, but also enable project managers to be able to manage a project team efficiently and effectively in human resources, based on specific recommendations.

Methodology of own research

A qualitative survey was conducted in 2019 and 2021 on a sample of undergraduate students and postgraduate students of faculties and specialties related to personnel management. The author used the method of an asynchronous interview (Walentynowicz-Moryl, 2017, p. 58), which was partially structured in writing. The interview questionnaire, which was made available to the respondents, covered 6 issues related to the universally understood subject of recruitment. One of the issues related to recruitment in project teams. Due to the subject matter of this article, the results are presented of research relating exclusively to this issue in it.

Questions relating to recruitment in project teams referred to two areas - the course of parting with an employee as part of a project team and shaping relations with former project employees.

The interview questionnaire was sent to 146 people. As a result of the analysis of the obtained feedback answers, 133 of them were qualified to the research sample. These were questionnaires, the authors of which answered questions about the area of recruitment in the project team. Due to the exploratory purpose of the presented research, no analysis of the relationship between the personal characteristics of the respondents and the opinions presented by them was conducted. The presentation of the research results is a qualitative analysis of the collected research material consisting of 32 pages of typescript. The presentation of the research results was enriched with quotes from the respondents.

Parting with project employees – the results of own research

When analyzing the results of the research, it is worth pointing out that most respondents referred in their statements only to recruitment because of the completion of the project or stage of the project (project work) for which the employee was recruited. Although the interview questionnaire had instructions about the departure of project employees during its implementation, only a few respondents referred to it in their statements.

One of the respondents noted that "the company (implementing the project - note A.) should give the employee a sufficient amount of time to familiarize the employee with the information about the dismissal, ... it should not take place overnight, unless the dismissal is concerned disciplinary "(50), and the second that" maintaining a positive relationship with a former employee is not always possible. The employee must then be openly notified of the reason for his dismissal, and the information that he may have performed his job poorly cannot be concealed"(71). The quoted statements refer only to the situation of dismissal of an employee at the initiative of the employer, e.g., when the employee does not fulfill the assigned tasks. However, none of the respondents referred to the voluntary departure of project employees. This may show that the feeling of the "timeliness" of work in the project by the respondents finds their approach to the possibility of making decisions about leaving by the employees themselves. After all, "people employed only as part of a project are aware that their cooperation is based on the performance of the entrusted task" (18), i.e. "if it is a situation in which both parties were aware of the end of the employment relationship at the end of the project" (57) the voluntary departure of an employee's project during its implementation is rather extremely rare.

Many of the statements of the respondents referred to the fact that parting with a project employee should be natural, and therefore easy and pleasant. This is showed by a statement of one of the respondents: "I think that parting with an employee who was employed only for a given project should not be as difficult as dismissing an employee we employed on a permanent basis" (61). On the other hand, another respondent emphasizes that "ending cooperation with an employee after the end of the project should proceed in a neutral manner, without emotions and with full culture on both sides" (59). Such an approach of the respondents may be found by the lack of the need to decide to end the cooperation directly by the project manager (less often by the employer), and thus by the lack of a sense of guilt towards the employee. Because in a situation where the breakup is due to the end of the project period, the de-recruitment process may seem only a formality. Meanwhile, this is not always the case. At this point, it is worth recalling the statement of another respondent, who referred to the experiences of his colleague and emphasized that parting with employees in "... the issue of projects and people hired to carry them out is multidimensional. My friend was contracted as an IT specialist to install new software for printers and install them in the Fast-food network .... Of course, he was subcontracted (project implementer – A. note) for a period of 4 months.

The job was particularly good, both in terms of the number of tasks, requirements, and atmosphere among colleagues, as well as earnings ... After 4 months, the company did not sign a new contract with him. At the end of the project, any contact from the company ended. He did not get a thank you. No one had any follow-up or recruitment interviews with him because, according to the company, he was only a project worker. This is an example of how not to deal with employees ... My friend, hoping to sign a new contract ... was left to himself during a raging pandemic and could not find himself in the labor market for the next few months"(107). It is impossible to disagree with the cited respondent. It turns out that even if it may seem that every employee should be aware of the timeliness of their employment when undertaking work in the project, they often count on the possibility of continuing cooperation. Then, leaving this employee without support and adequate communication of the upcoming termination of cooperation may result in a deterioration of the employer's image, and even a negative opinion about the project contractor or manager on the labor market. One of the respondents noticed the exceptional value of communication in terms of the period of termination of cooperation with employees, noting that "informing the employee about leaving the company after the end of the project should take place at least 2 or 3 months earlier" (22). In such a situation, the employed person can plan a further career path, and the employer limits the possibility of speculation among the staff about an extension of contracts or proposing other jobs.

Referring to how the parting with project employees should go ahead after the end of the project, it is worth noting that the respondents agreed that it is best for the project manager to conduct a summary meeting, during which he could conduct an overall evaluation of the project and assessment of cooperation with individual employees. Depending on the size of the team, respondents suggest a joint meeting for the entire project team or smaller teams, but necessarily with the project manager. The role of the project manager, at the stage of parting with employees, is to thank for the cooperation, appreciate the contribution they made in the implementation of the project, and encourage them to keep relationships and show the possibility of probable future cooperation. "In my opinion, it would be a clever idea to formally express thanks and appreciation to the entire department or team with which he worked" (51), remarks one interviewee.

In turn, line managers, as part of their project subgroups, should conduct individual meetings with their direct subordinates during which they will thoroughly discuss their work, successes, and failures, indicate strengths and weaknesses, learn about further career plans, as well as the employee's opinions about working in the project. According to the respondents, an individual recruitment interview is extremely important, as it creates the possibility of unraveling "all misunderstandings" (64). "If there are any ambiguities between the legislator and the employee during the project, it is worth clarifying them at the end of the cooperation" (119), emphasizes another respondent. During such a meeting, "the employer should honestly say what was successful in the project and what was worse, and what difficulties were there,

and then ask the former employee what it was like on his part" (32) - emphasizes another respondent. Moreover, "when we part with an employee after completing a project, it should be assumed that he or she has a lot of knowledge about the functioning of the company and the projects that are implemented in it. It should be ensured that this potential is not wasted"(40) - points out another respondent. "It is worth asking for the employee's opinion on the functioning of the company, working conditions or organization. One should also ask how he assesses the atmosphere and relations with co-workers during the project implementation"(76).

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that most respondents believe that the employer should take specific actions aimed at supporting project employees in finding alternative employment. "The employer should try to make parting with the employee a fresh start for him (the employee - note A.)" (88) - emphasizes one of the respondents, while another indicates that "to maintain positive relations with the former employee after the end of the project, the employer should obligatorily offer the dismissed person an alternative occupation. He should think about the employee's fate in advance and, if possible, propose another job or help in finding one"(78). These activities, as indicated by the respondents, can take the form of programs (e.g., in the form of offboarding or outplacement), but also be conducted separately, depending on the needs of the employees themselves (e.g., "issuing references" (78) or "opinions about cooperation on Linkedin "(80) or" letter of recommendation "(35). Moreover, it is worth" finding out after some time whether he (the employee - note A.) was able to find another job and / or offer help in this regard "(78).

All respondents emphasized the value of shaping further relationships with former project employees. "It is important to keep good relations with him (the employee - note A.), especially if we work in an industry with a high demand for specific specialists (e.g., IT). In this way, we do not close the chance to resume cooperation with a given person in the future, in addition, the departing employee may also recommend other specialists in each field to us"(63) - emphasizes one of the respondents in his opinion. "After a well-conducted project, not only the effects that were the goal of its creation are important, but also the knowledge we get during the project. In order not to lose the newly created relationship, after the end of the project, you must act already during it ... then we can expect a positive image of the employer and a field of cooperation or help for both parties"(15).

Summary

The quotes cited in the above part of the article show a comprehensive approach to the process of leaving employees presented by the respondents. They show both aspects related to the summary of the period of cooperation, mutual evaluation, as well as planning further

relationships and help in finding a new job provided by the employer (entity implementing the project).

Almost all respondents emphasized in their statements that regardless of the assessment of the quality of work carried out as part of the project, each parting with an employee should take place in a good, friendly atmosphere, and "the project manager can prepare a small gift or a congratulatory diploma for the employee, which will be positive it was associated with the duration of the project "(93).

According to the author, the presented research results can be summed up with a quote from one of the respondents, who shows that "the employee's parting from the employer after the project is completed should end with a friendly conversation, where the following aspects will be discussed:

- Summary of the project results.
- Mutual expression of opinion on cooperation.
- Mutual thanks for the time worked together.
- Possibility of cooperation in the future"(72).

The research results presented in the article may constitute the basis for the development of recruitment procedures in project management organizations in relation to the separation of employees after the completion of the project. However, they cannot be the basis for any conclusions about the parting of employees who leave the project during its duration, e.g., because of voluntary departures or dismissals at the initiative of the employer. The issue of recruitment in project teams should therefore be a further research area. According to the author, an interesting research area may be the views of employees who left the project teams during its implementation. The implementation of quantitative research in this area would make it possible to verify the reasons for the voluntary departures during the project, the reasons and course of the layoffs, as well as the prospects for shaping further relations between the project manager/employer and former employees.

References

1. Ahsan, K., Ho, M., Khan, S. (2013). Recruiting Project Managers: A Comparative Analysis of Competencies and Recruitment Signals From Job Advertisements. *Project Management Journal*, *Vol. 44, No. 5,* pp. 36-54.
2. Al-Nabae, M.G., Sammani, D. (2019). Training methods for developing project team members, *International Journal of Innovation and Industrial Revolution, Vol. 1 Iss. 1,* eISSN: 2637-0972, pp. 1-12.

3. Bukłaha, E. (2010). System ocen pracowniczych z uwzględnieniem zespołów projektowych. In: R. Bartkowiak, J. Ostaszewski, *Nauki ekonomiczne w świetle nowych wyzwań gospodarczych* (pp. 451-465). Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH.

4. Bushe, G.R. (2010). When People Come and Go. *The Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704100604575145950278914776, 28.03.2022.

5. Cabała, P., Jarosz, Sz., Sołtysik, M., Zakrzewska, M. (2020). Kompetencje kierownika projektu w świetle wytycznych Individual Competence Baseline v.4.0. In: J. Walas-Trębacz, T. Małkus (eds.), *Zarządzanie organizacjami w społeczeństwie informacyjnym. Projekty – Procesy – Struktury* (pp. 37-48). Toruń: Towarzystwo Naukowe Organizacji i Kierownictwa, Stowarzyszenie Wyższej Użyteczności „Dom Organizatora".

6. Chmielewiec, B. (2018). Rola kierownika zespołu projektowego w polskich realiach. *Edukacja ekonomistów i menedżerów*, *1(47),* pp. 59-76.

7. Frączkowski, K., Janiak, A.M., Kosakowski, J., Kruk, M., Mastalerz, M., Stankowska, A. (2016). *Zarządzanie zespołami projektowymi.* Warszawa: Texter.

8. Jarosławska, A. (2010). System oceny projektowej. *Personel i Zarządzanie*, *nr 6,* pp. 82-85.

9. Kaczmarska-Krawczak, J. (2013). Uwarunkowania kształtowania zespołu projektowego w organizacji. In: T. Listwan (ed.), *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie*, *Społeczne problemy zarządzania projektami*, *t. 14, z. 11, cz. 1,* pp. 51-64.

10. Karbownik, A. (2006). Kierowanie zespołem projektowym w procesie zarządzania projektem w górnictwie. *Górnictwo i Geologia*, *T. 1, z. 3,* pp. 5-17.

11. Kisielnicki, J. (2016). Kierownik projektu informatycznego i jego rola w zespole realizującym projekt. *Studia Informatica Pomerania, Metody komputerowe w procesie podejmowania decyzji, nr 4(42),* pp. 109-122.

12. Klimiuk, J. (2009). Rola kierownika projektu oraz zespołu projektowego w zarządzaniu projektami, *Bezpieczeństwo i Technika Pożarnicza*, *Nr 3.* Centrum Naukowo-Badawcze Ochrony Przeciwpożarowej im. Józefa Tuliszkowskiego - Państwowy Instytut Badawczy, pp. 35-45.

13. Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, I. (2013). Tworzenie i kompetencje zespołu projektowego. *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie, t. XIV, z. 11, cz. I.* Wydawnictwo SAN, ISSN 1733-2486, pp. 65-76.

14. Krajewska-Nieckarz, M., Białas, K.B. (2021). Proces doboru personelu do wirtualnego zespołu projektowego, *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie, t. XIV, z. 11, cz. I.* Wydawnictwo SAN, ISSN 1733-2486, pp. 89-103.

15. Listwan, T. (2011). Determinanty skuteczności kierowania zespołem projektowym. *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie. Koncepcje i metody współczesnego zarządzania, t. 12, z. 14,* pp. 119-131.

16. Parker, S.K., Skitmore, R.M. (2005). Project management turnover: causes and effects on project performance. *International Journal of Project Management, 23(3)*, pp. 205-214.

17. Schmid, B. (2007). Motivation in Project Management: The Project Manager's Perspective. Florida State University Libraries. *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations.* The Graduate School.

18. Singh, H. (2014). *Mastering Project Human Resource Management: Effectively Organize and Communicate with All Project Stakeholders.* Pearson FT Press.

19. Sroka, M. (2017). Współczesne metody motywowania do pracy w zespole projektowym. *Journal of Modern Management Proces. Instrumenty budowy zaangażowania w marketingu i projektach*, nr 2, pp. 36-44.

20. Stor, M. (2013). Kwalifikacje i kompetencje członków międzynarodowych zespołów projektowych w obszarze ZZL. *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie*, t. XIV, z. 11, cz. I, pp. 207-229.

21. Szymańska, K. (2012). Przegląd współczesnych poglądów na zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w projektach. *Rocznik Naukowy Wydziału Zarządzania w Ciechanowie. Wydanie 1-4,* pp. 129-149.

22. Wachowiak, P., Gregorczyk, S. (2018). Kompetencje kierowników zespołu projektowego. *Studia i Prace Kolegium Zarządzania i Finansów, z. 159.* Szkoła Główna Handlowa, pp.75-93.

23. Walentynowicz-Moryl, K. (2017). Indywidualny wywiad online – technika asynchroniczna. *Relacje. Studia z nauk społecznych*, nr 3, pp. 55-65.