Effective Project Management

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Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements. It is accomplished through the application and integration of the project management processes of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing. The project manager is the person responsible for accomplishing the project objectives.

Managing a project includes:

- ❖ Identifying requirements
- ❖ Establishing clear and achievable objectives
- ❖ Balancing the competing demands for quality, scope, time and cost
- ❖ Adapting the specifications, plans, and approach to the different concerns and expectations of the various stakeholders.

Project managers often talk of a 'triple constraint'-project scope, time and cost-in managing competing project requirements. Project quality is affected by balancing these three factors. High quality projects deliver the required product, service or result within scope, on time, and within budget. The relationship among these factors is such that if any one of the three factors changes, at least one other factor is likely to be affected. Project managers also manage projects in response to uncertainty. Project risk is an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, has a positive or negative effect on at least one project objective.

You have heard the old adage – plan the work and work the plan. In essence, that is the key to successful project management. You must first plan out the project and then monitor and control the execution of the program work. It's hard to overestimate the importance of proper planning. In general, project failures can most often be traced back to deficiencies in the planning process. There are three major deliverables from the project planning process – the Project Definition, the work plan, and the project management procedures.

Utilizing a Project Definition Document

There is a tendency for projects to shortchange the planning process, with an emphasis on jumping right in and beginning the work. This is a mistake. The time spent properly planning will result in reduced cost and duration, and increased quality over the life of the project. The Project Definition is the primary deliverable from the planning process and describes all aspects of the project at a high level. Once approved by the customer and relevant stakeholders, it becomes the basis for the work to be performed.

The Project Definition includes information such as:

❖ Project overview – Why is the project taking place? What are the business drivers?

❖ Benefits - What are the business benefits?

❖ Objectives – What will be accomplished by the project? What do you hope to achieve?

❖ Scope – What deliverables will be created? What major features and functions will be implemented? What organizations will be converted? What is specifically out of scope?

❖ Assumptions and Risks – What events are you taking for granted (assumptions) and what events are you concerned about? What will you do to manage the risks to the project?

❖ Approach – Describe in words how the project will unfold and proceed.

❖ Organization – Show the significant roles on the project. The project manager is easy, but who is the sponsor? Who is on the project team? Are any of the stakeholders represented?

❖ Signature Page – Ask the sponsor and key stakeholders to approve this document, signifying that they are in agreement with what is planned.

❖ Initial Effort, Cost, and Duration Estimates – These should start as best guess estimates, and then be revised, if necessary, when the work plan is completed.

Project Work Plan

After the Project Definition has been prepared, the work plan can be created. The work plan provides the step-by-step instructions for constructing project deliverables and managing the project. You should use a prior work plan from a similar project as a model, if one exists. If not, build one the old-fashioned way by utilizing a work-break down structure and network diagram. Create a detailed work plan, including assigning resources and estimating the work as far out as you feel comfortable. This is your planning horizon. Past the planning horizon, lay out the project at a higher level, reflecting the increased level of uncertainty. The planning horizon will move forward as the project progresses. High-level activities that were initially vague need to be defined in more detail as their timeframe gets closer.

Define Project Management Procedures Up-Front

It is important to be able to manage the project rigorously and proactively and ensure the project team and all stakeholders have a common understanding of how the project will be managed. If common procedures have already been established for your organization, utilize them on your project.

Once the project has been planned sufficiently, execution of the work can begin. In theory, since you already have agreement on your Project Definition and your work plan and project management procedures are in place, the only challenge is to execute your plans and processes correctly. Of course, no project ever proceeds entirely as it was estimated and planned. The challenge is having the rigor and discipline needed to apply your project management skills correctly and proactively.

Review the work plan on a regular basis to determine how you are progressing in terms of schedule and budget. If your effort is small, this may need to be weekly. For larger projects, the frequency might be every two weeks.

Identify activities that have been completed during the previous time period and update the work plan to show that they are finished. Determine whether there are any other activities that should have been completed, but have not been. After the work plan has been updated, determine if the project will be completed within the original effort, cost, and duration. If not, determine the critical path and look for ways to accelerate these activities to get you back on track. Monitor the budget. Look at the amount of money your project has actually consumed and determine whether the actual spending is more than estimated based on the work that has been completed. If so, be proactive. Either work with the team to determine how the remaining work will be completed to hit your original budget or else raise a risk that you may exceed your allocated budget.

Importantly, remember projects are comprised of teams all with a voice in the outcome.

Live up to the label - **P.R.O.J.E.C.T.**

P Planned
R Rational
O Objectives &
J Justified
E Expectations
C Coordinated &
T Team Driven

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