

WHY YOU NEED TO KNOW



PROJECT MANAGEMENT

By Lori L. Silverman

Most of the work in today's organizations has become projectized. Reflect on your own work. How many projects do you lead and/or participate in on a regular basis?

Now reflect again. What have you done recently to enhance your project management skills? For the past two years I have been actively involved in two university-based project management certificate programs. This experience has made me realize how critical it is for an organization to follow a formal, disciplined approach to project management.

PROJECTS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A project is a temporary, one-time multi-activity piece of work that has clearly defined start and end dates, project scope and objectives, budget and performance requirements that produces a specific deliverable(s). Examples of projects include constructing a building, writing a book, and developing a new product. What is project management? It is the planning, estimating, scheduling and controlling of those activities that must be accomplished in order to accomplish the objectives in a manner that meets customer requirements and comes in on time and on budget.

THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT LIFECYCLE

The Project Management Institute (PMI) defines five phases in the project management lifecycle in its Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide): initiating, planning, executing, control and closing. Each of

these phases has specific inputs, tools and techniques and outputs that are outlined in detail in the PMBOK® Guide.

Prior to project initiation, several steps occur: development of a business case or feasibility study, assignment of a project sponsor, and identification of stakeholders and their needs. In mature project management organizations, quantitative measures are then used to prioritize all projects against each other. The initiating phase includes creating a project notebook and journal, establishing the core team, developing a project charter, holding a kick-off meeting and beginning status reporting. Sound familiar so far? While these activities may be part of a performance improvement team's work, the discipline of project management has defined them much more explicitly and encourages a common approach to their accomplishment across projects.

The next phase, planning, is when all project activities are identified using a Work Breakdown Structure (you may know this as a tree diagram or systematic diagram—one of the 7 Management and Planning Tools). Following this, resources (both human and non human) are identified and assigned, and a budget and detailed project schedule (i.e., network diagram and critical path) are developed based on these project activities. The project team then creates a risk management plan, a quality plan, and a contract management plan (if required), and control processes, if they currently do not exist, for handling variances, issues,

crises and changes. All of these documents are compiled into a single project plan.

Now tell me. How often do you engage in these steps prior to beginning work on a performance improvement project? From what I have observed, it is not unusual for these steps to be skipped. This results in a team that does not know what activities need to be done by whom and in what order to accomplish the project and whether the project can be accomplished on time, within budget constraints. It also allows for scope creep, one of the major challenges facing all projects.

In project execution, the core team may be enlarged to include others. At this time metrics and data collection methods are put in place and the project is controlled using the control processes mentioned earlier. The project team meets regularly to review its progress against its plan. The final phase, closing involves performing a project post-mortem where the entire project is reviewed and lesson learned are documented for future use. A final project report is also generated for the sponsor and key stakeholders.

THE BENEFITS OF A STRUCTURED APPROACH

While you can use the project management lifecycle with your own projects, its true benefits are derived when an organization creates and standardizes its own

project management framework based on it. This allows for a common language to be utilized across functions and project teams, for projects across the organization to be prioritized based on a single set of criteria and for data to be collected and interpreted across all projects. It also means that each project can be approached in a similar manner and that employees can be trained on a common set of project management steps independent of the nature of the project. This level of standardization fosters continual improvement of each of the elements in the framework.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Project management is a rapidly growing discipline in the field of management. As an association, membership in PMI (www.pmi.org) has topped almost 90,000

since its inception in 1969. If you want to ensure that projects achieve their intended outcomes, become familiar with the PMBOK® Guide and take a project management overview course from a PMI Registered Education Provider (REP). Also consider enrolling in a project management certificate program and helping your organization to develop its own project management framework. I believe that those individuals and organizations that will be truly successful in the future will be able to integrate the disciplines of performance improvement and project management in their approach to project work.

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Lori L. Silverman is the owner of Partners for Progress, a management consulting firm dedicated to helping organizations achieve and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. She is also the co-author of *Critical SHIFT: The Future of Quality in Organizational Performance* and the book *Stories Trainers Tell: 55 Ready-to-Use Stories to Make Training Stick*. Lori can be reached by e-mail at lori@partnersforprogress.com.

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