

The Vitality of Project Management

Robert Haskins

INF 410: Project Management

Roberta Bledsoe

16 April 2012

The Vitality of Project Management

The rigors of conducting business in today's world have propelled the profession of project management into the forefront of a successful organization. In the text written by Erik Larson and Clifford Grey (2011) they spell out the importance of project management as a "Results-oriented management style that places a premium on building collaborative relationships among a diverse cast of characters" (pp. 3). However, project management goes far beyond this explanation and a conclusive definition of how it affects the business world is examined. The project manager benefits an organization by instituting a project life cycle to formulate a path towards its success. The planning stage in the life cycle sets the status of "What the project will entail, when it will be schedule, whom it will benefit, what quality level should be maintained, and what the budget will be" (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 7). This stage will take a great deal of research and critical thinking. The characteristics of a project manager include being an effective leader and having a collaborative relationship with a sponsor. In addition, the implementation of the five-stage team development model will create a cohesive, effective, and exhibit positive synergy in project team building. The work breakdown schedule (WBS) is a useful tool of the project manager that delegates the tasks involved in the project to work packages, "Short duration tasks that have a definite start and stop point" (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 110). Some projects become so large that a need for project management software will minimize the technical factors keeping track of the activities in a project plan. This software will help to maintain the focus on the scope of the project and benefit the organization overall. The profession of project manager has become a vital part to the success of an organization.

The term project management is not regulated to a specific sector or profession. It is a skill set used by many professions and businesses as a process to completing goal-oriented tasks with a defined start and end to a project that will benefit the organization. However, with an increase in demand for membership to the Project Management Institute (PMI), “A professional organizations for project managers” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 3) indicates how the profession is becoming more unique and exceptional from the other professions. This also shows the importance of project managers to many businesses.

Project managers are vital to business because of the work they do to meet the expectations of the customer. “The project management plans the allocated budget, resources and testing methods that keep the pace of production high, both qualitatively and quantitatively” (Pandey, 2012). Quality and cost controls are important to maintain the integrity of the project. Therefore, a great deal of care is taken by the project manager to control these factors and report them to senior management and stakeholders.

Insufficient communication between associates and the sponsors of the project can negatively affect the organization. “Stakeholders...prefer investing in those companies that deliver projects on time and keep them informed about updates and progress of the projects” (Pandey, 2012). The project manager can become a bridge to communicate the discovery of flaws and risks that can harm the confidence in them and/or the organization.

The competitive nature of business in today’s world creates pressure that forges risks that all project managers will have to mitigate, avoid, transfer, and retain. However, the project manager is not without a set of tools that help them to assess the risks with scenario and probability analysis, and the risk severity matrix. “Risk management identifies as many risk

events as possible, minimize their impact, manages responses to those events that do materialize, and provides contingency funds to cover risk events that actually materialize” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 211). The risk assessment works in conjunction with strategic planning to guide the project towards success.

Strategic planning is vital to the success of an organization and it does not spare the role a project manager plays. “A project management team helps the company in achieving the strategic goals, as it streamlines the task of a company in taking many important decisions” (Pandey, 2012). What is meant by this quote is that an organization depends on the project manager to take the decisions that are paramount with the goals and expectations of the customer. Therefore, these points are evidence that project management is very important to the prosperity of the organization.

The project lifecycle management is the foundation in which project managers use to guide them throughout the project. The lifecycle distinguishes the fact that projects have a beginning and an end with defining, planning, executing, and closing stages as the course of the project. As a professional driver, I have recognized the same path a project manager would use to succeed on a project.

The first stage is the defining stage when the “Project objectives are established” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 7). I would compare this to when I receive a call from one of the various brokers with a delivery. My objectives are established with the details of the shipping pick-up and drop-off and my responsibilities are then defined.

The second stage in the project lifecycle is the planning stage. This is the phase when the plan is cultivated spelling out “What the project will entail, when it will be scheduled, whom it

will benefit, what quality level should be maintained, and what the budget will be” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 7). This same approach can be used in professional driving by considering what the trip will be, when the delivery time is, how it will benefit the client, the quality of the customer service I provide, and the expenses I use to deliver the product.

The execution stage is the third phase of the project lifecycle and it involves the actual physical and mental exertion and execution of the plan. For the professional driver this is the actual driving done but the same controls of time, cost, and specifications measures. (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 8)

The last phase in the project lifecycle is the closing stage. This is the process of “Delivering the project product to the customer, redeploying project resources, and post-project review” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 9). The same process is used for the professional driver as the delivery of the product is made to the customer. In addition, I redirect the resources of additional fuel to the next “project” or run that I make. Furthermore, I make an effort to look more into how the trip could have been more productive, if possible. The project lifecycle is an important tool for the project manager and those that are responsible to complete the goals of the organization.

During the project lifecycle, an important phase is the planning stage because it establishes the key element of organization within the network of activities. What first needs to be done is to determine the approach of the network by deciding on whether to implement an activity-on-node or activity-on-arrow. These two approaches use the basic premise of the exercise on the activity. The only element that distinguishes them from one another is the distinction of how the activity is described. For instance, in the activity-on-node approach, the

activity is shown using a node and the activity-on-arrow approach uses arrows to show activity. What drives the planning stage and is a building block of the project network is “Critical thinking and research [because it] is mandatory in the development of a project life cycle. The planning stage of a project is the foundation for all subsequent stages. Schedules, budgets, and resources are determined at this stage of the project life cycle” (Dean, 2012).

A major contributor to a successful project organization is support given from the sponsors and/or stakeholders. The sponsor is the person or group of people that has the authority and recognizes the need for change. They are the ones in the organization that will take the repercussions of failure and success. Therefore, reliance on a project manager to deliver the idea for change is important to the sponsor and ultimately the organization. In addition, it is important for the project manager to know who the sponsors are and what they expect, only effective communication between the sponsors and the project manager will create the environment for all those involved to succeed in the project. The project manager needs “To ensure that the sponsors have enough authority or influence to undertake the work and bring about the proposed change in affected parts of the organization” (The ePMBBook, 2007). If the sponsor supports the project but only has the authority of a specific department and the project does not have the support of other departments that are effected, the project will fail.

The belief in a successful leader as a project manager is strengthened by the trust given by the sponsor. Some have said that leaders are born and others would say that it could be learned. In project management, the characteristics of an effective leader are motivation, direction, and organization. Project managers are able to motivate those who work on the tasks in the project and able to give direction towards the implementation of the plan. These

characteristics can only be achieved through good organizational skills. Another characteristic that must be mentioned is honesty and trust. “Trust withers through neglect” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 362). It is very important to maintain the trust with the sponsor and face-to-face communication will help to suspend the reaction of “Doubt, suspicion, and even monetary bouts of paranoia” (pp. 362).

Building the team that will accomplish the goals of the project is important to the organization and creating positive synergy with those members will make the goals possible. A five-stage model has been created to help formulate a cohesive and effective team. Forming is the initial stage to get members acquainted with each other and relate them to the scope of the project. Storming is a stage that can either destroy the team or bring them together and an effective project leader can convince the team to “Accept that they are part of a project group [and] resist the constraints that the project and group put on the individuality” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 378). The third stage is norming “In which close relationships develop and the group demonstrates cohesiveness” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 378). This stage also establishes team groups that work together towards a common goal. The performing stage in team development is the point in which the actual work begins and all of the team begins to accomplish the goals of the project. The last stage is adjourning and it marks the end of the project. However, this stage does not just indicate the end of a project, “The team prepares for its own disbandment” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 378) by adjusting to the change of the satisfaction of a job well done or the loss of a friendship the team members have become comfortable. The development of a team using the five-stage method is an effective way to bring together the diversity of people to a cohesive group that can successfully accomplish the goals that have been set forth.

The Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) is the process a project manager use to divide the tasks of the project network into “Smaller and smaller work elements” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 108). What the WBS does is make it possible for the project manager to effectively analyze cost and work performance at each stage of the deliverables whether they are major or minor deliverable. In addition, the project manager can answer any questions or submit progress reports to the sponsors of the project and “Problems can be addressed and coordinated because the structure integrates work and responsibility” (Larson & Gray, 2011, pp. 109). With the WBS, the project manager can assign individuals or groups to specific work packages to effectively plan, schedule, and budget the project. There are a number of different types of WBS that project managers can use according to the complexity of the project they are involved. However, the hierarchal structure is the most common because of the unique identification method to organize each level of deliverables and work packages. (Project Management Documents, N.D.)

The software project managers are using to help them build the network and develop the project organization has revolutionized the way they create the opportunities to complete their goals. Whether the organizations are large or small, project managers are using software that helps to collaborate with others on the project, delegate tasks, stay on schedule, track projects, and communicate with clients and vendors. (Brookins, N.D.) Software has provided associates with the ability “To collaborate on projects by sharing documents, timelines, and status updates” (Brookins, N.D.). The software also helps the organization and project leads a way to delegate the tasks by assigning roles in the system. In addition, staying on schedule is very important to reducing cost and increasing productivity. “This information alerts employees to upcoming

deadlines, allowing them to manage their time appropriately to complete tasks before or on the listed due date” (Brookins, N.D.). Another key element to the success of a project is the ability to track the progress of the project. “The software will let you know what's been completed, as well as by whom, and what still needs to be done” (Brookins, N.D.). Lastly, just as the software can help the associates to collaborate on the projects to help resolve issues internally, the software can also help keep the clients and vendors informed of the progress of the project. Project management software has become an effective tool to help the project manager with the complexity of the projects they are involved.

Project management has become a vital asset to the success of an organization and the project manager is at the forefront of this success. A project manager will use fundamental tools to accomplish the tasks that help to make the process of completing projects a successful one. For instance, the project lifecycle and more specifically the planning stage is paramount to accomplishing the organizational goals. The project manager must portray the characteristics of leadership and have effective communication with the sponsors of the project to let the project prosper. Developing the team members by using the five-stage development method will effectively create a team that can become cohesive, focused, and productive towards the established goals. The Work Breakdown Structure organizes the complexity of the project into small work packages to give the project manager the ability to analyze the cost and work performance. Recently software has been developed to help the project manager maintain key components to the project by simplifying the fundamental tools and organizing the many moving and non-moving parts of a project. All these things discussed have given credence to the vitality all project managers have on today’s business world.

References

- Brookins, M. (N.D.). *Benefits of Using Project Management Software*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from www.chron.com: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/benefits-using-project-management-software-2196.html#loopbegin>
- Dean, G. (2012, January 4). *Complex Campaigns Can Benefit From Project Management*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from www.marketography.com: <http://marketography.com/2012/01/04/complex-campaigns-can-benefit-from-project-management/>
- Larson, E., & Gray, C. F. (2011). *Project Management: The managerial process* (5th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Pandey, K. (2012, March 2). *Why is Project Management Important*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from www.buzzle.com: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/why-is-project-management-important.html>
- Project Management Documents. (N.A.). *Work Breakdown Structure Templates*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from <http://www.projectmanagementdocs.com/templates/Work%20Breakdown%20Structure.pdf>
- The ePMBook. (2007). *Project Definition*. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from www.epmbook.com: <http://www.epmbook.com/projdefwhy.htm>