1 AN INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT: THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

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Project management has been called both an art and a science. In any environment – whether public sector (government), business, or non-profit – the difference between success and failure is often the ability to effectively manage a spectrum of projects under a variety of time, resource, and customer constraints.

Mastering the science of project management provides a foundation for the art of leadership; the necessary skills are common to both. There is no question that the best project managers are also outstanding leaders. They have vision, they motivate, they bring people together, and, most of all, they accomplish great things.

In looking at project management, it is important to draw upon existing academic as well as professional research and experience. As such, the business model is held out as an important foundation; it contains the most developed body of research and case studies with respect to project management. Unlike other research on project management, the private sector has a firm tradition of applying theory to everyday requirements. While the business model serves as a useful paradigm, the principles derived are applicable to a variety of government and NGO organizations.

Before getting into the principles and techniques of project management, lets first try to conceptualize what a project and project management actually represent.

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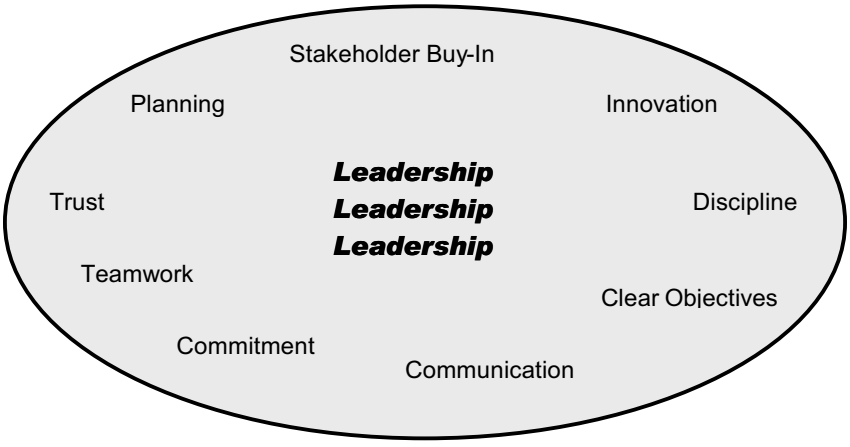
A ***project*** is a unique set of activities that are meant to produce a specific outcome, with a specific start and finish date, and a specific allocation of resources. This is in contrast to ongoing operations that involve repetitive work with no defined end. Projects are bounded by three elements or project 'parameters': results, time and resources.

Project management is a formal management discipline in which projects are planned and carried out using a *systematic*, *repeatable* and *scaleable* process.

It is the process of developing substantive data about each project parameter so that the decision-making between parameters is more effective. Whether you are the project manager or part of the team, or working in a 60-person effort, these skills can be adapted to increase organizational and individual capacity. You apply the same methodology to a $50,000 project as to one with a budget of ten million dollars. Of course, each project will be different in scope, but the thinking process –the project management paradigm – in which each project is planned and executed will be similar.

Fundamentals for success



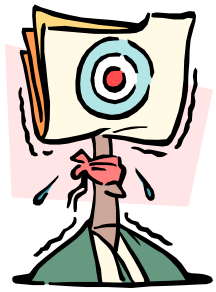
Leadership

Leaders motivate, they inspire, they create vision. Leadership can involve a single person or team of people that take charge and are both responsible and accountable. Leadership is about stepping in front, taking risks when required, and inspiring other members of the organization to excel. True leaders also have the ability to be good followers.

In a project management team, the project manager is typically the team leader. However, each team member is required to lead as well, assuming responsibility for their specific tasks while assisting other team members to achieve team objectives.

The project manager and project team are expected to deliver the project on time, on budget and on schedule. And, when conditions make such performance impossible – such as an unexpected closure of Ramallah – the project leader must make it clear that objectives must be changed to fit new realities. Even when things happen that are not controllable, the project manager and team are still responsible. A lack of responsibility by the project manager will result in poor team cohesion and a subsequent lack of responsibility in team members.

What leads to failure?



Success is contingent upon a variety of factors as detailed above. In the light of these fundamental success factors, let's look at some characteristics of failure.

⊡ *Team member ill suited to project*: Having a team composed of people who are both committed and capable is essential. That said, human resource constraints, often coupled with multiple simultaneous projects, can reduce the pool of quality personnel. If these personnel are trained appropriately either before or during the opening weeks of the project, then team cohesion and efficiency will increase. If they are not trained, or are not willing to be trained, it is best to exclude them from the project. That said, team leaders must search for ways to motivate and bring out positive qualities in every team member. This can, at times, be frustrating and does not always achieve desired results. If an effort is not made to create a balanced team, high stress on capable individuals is certain and less-than-optimum project performance or failure – either on the current or succeeding project (burnout) – almost certain.

⊡ *Political expediency, infighting*: Decisions at the project level should be based upon what is required for project success. At times senior management will take decisions that negatively impact certain projects, but enhance overall organizational goals. Basing decisions on individual self-interest – promotion, accountability avoidance, attacking perceived enemies – ultimately results in a drop in organizational, team, and individual performance and subsequent reward. This does not mean that decisions are made in a vacuum avoiding political or external considerations; doing so will itself result in failure. Decisions must instead balance political interests with what is required to achieve success.

⊡ *Micro-manage project managers and teams*: The relationship between senior management and the project manager, and in turn the project manager and team members, should be based on respect and trust. While a higher level of intervention in team issues is likely required at project onset and times of crisis, such intervention should be kept to a minimum – let people do their jobs. Mistakes may happen, but good monitoring and control procedures will mitigate the risks from mistakes while team members learn. If management is forced to intervene because of team negligence, than the quality of team personnel should be questioned.

⊡ *Never admit a project is a failure or irrelevant*: Sometimes projects, for whatever reason or set of reasons, do not succeed. It is therefore essential, through constant monitoring and assessment, to declare a project as a failure when no positive end state is possible. In addition, as the organization evolves, certain projects may become redundant or irrelevant to changed organizational vision. So-called “cutting of losses” will both free up resources for use on other potentially successful projects while minimizing the institutional and personnel damage from unnecessarily extending doomed or irrelevant projects.

⊡ *New ideas die from inertia*: Innovation is central to organizational development, yet a sometimes over-conservative approach to new ideas is characteristic of management as well as staff – most people are not comfortable with change. Yet, when new ideas are put forth, the project manager must assess them for potential value and then decide whether they are worth implementing. Such evaluation should consider the judgment of team members and senior decision-makers. Evaluate each idea on its merits; think about it as a leader as a project manager. The history of organizations is replete with missed opportunities due to an unwillingness to consider new ideas.

⊡ *Don't build-in fallback options*: Nothing ever works in strict accordance to pre-project planning, yet gauging the potential for deviation – or alternative scenario analysis – is essential to try and determine how project plans may change or need to change given the fluid nature of most operating environments. The use of risk management is critical if projects are to achieve their full potential. And, as project manager, a changing environment should never be an excuse for poor performance. Managers do not have a crystal ball to tell them the future, but risk management and pre-project scenario analysis can provide capabilities and processes for managing change.

⊡ *Push an idea into practice too quickly:* While not acting upon new ideas can prove fatal, the reverse is also true. Implementing ideas without having fully evaluated them can prove disastrous. Ideas must be evaluated and hopefully tested before being fully integrated into the project management process.