

How to Execute the Project Management Plan



Michael D. Taylor

Copyright © 2003-2009 by Michael D. Taylor

All Rights Reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means -- graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval system -- without written permission of Michael D. Taylor, Systems Management Services (<http://www.projectmgt.com>).

HOW TO EXECUTE THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN

THE PROJECT MANAGER'S ROLE

Once the project management plan has been formulated, and “debugged” in the Final Planning Review, it must be executed by the project manager. There are at least five major roles that the project manager plays during this phase; 1) ensuring a paradigm shift from planning to implementation, 2) keeping key stakeholders informed, 3) protecting intellectual property, 4) developing teams, and 5) recognizing and rewarding exceptional work. Project managers also conduct regular status reviews which will be addressed in Chapter 7, “How to Monitor Project Status.”

ENSURING A PARADIGM SHIFT

During the planning phase there exists an appropriate mindset that what is being estimated is not yet fixed. However, once the transition from the planning phase to the execution phase takes place, a corresponding paradigm shift among project participants must also take place. The shift must be made from tentativeness to implementation. This is often accomplished by conducting an execution “kick off” meeting which not only announces the transition but also attempts to get participants to now see the task at hand which is to be accomplished. This is one of the project manager’s primary roles in the execution phase of the project.

KEEPING STAKEHOLDERS INFORMED

Another important role of the project manager in this phase is to keep the key stakeholders informed of the project’s status. The purpose of these briefings is show that the project manager understands key stakeholder interests and is successfully managing them.

Using the communication plan, established in the initiation phase, the project manager provides pertinent status information at the appropriate level and scope. Key financial stakeholders are interested primarily in the cash flow aspects, and less interested in the technical details of the product design status. Sponsors and customers are interested in the overall schedule and cost status, and what is being done to resolve any major issues. Functional managers are interested primarily in the technical aspects of the project, and how well their “loaned” personnel are performing.

Because of these varying points of interest the project manager must customize these briefings to the interests of the individual stakeholders. Project managers must be careful not to overwhelm stakeholders with excessive esoteric technical jargon.

PROTECTING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

As new design concepts develop it is vital that they be protected by the project manager. It is important for the project manager to find a qualified, experienced patent attorney early in the project, and to begin the protection process quickly. This begins by keeping detailed records of the new product development, including documentation, and properly labeling them as “proprietary” so that project personnel don’t inadvertently expose them to competitors. Patent attorneys then research existing records to see if similar patents exist. When appropriate, necessary design and functional patents will be submitted, along with any necessary copyrights and trademarks. In this same line of protection, export licensing must also be examined if products are to be exported to other countries. Certain technologies are prohibited from exportation.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Teams don’t grow into high-performance teams automatically. To assume so is naïve on the part of the project manager. Teams must be developed quickly when they are formed to solve complex problems.

One of the most critical steps in developing project teams is to ensure that they have a clear, specific, measurable goal that is “owned” by all. Because they are temporary teams must learn to work together quickly. Today’s teams are often multifunctional, made up of various disciplines. Because of this, they may bring their own “languages” (terminology, mnemonics, abbreviations, etc.) into team discussions which can create communication problems.

Team leaders and project managers must be aware of this and ensure that communications are clear to all. Having a clear *purpose* is more vital to distance-separated teams than it is to co-located teams. With the availability of the Internet project managers can tap into various skills around the world, thus alleviating the problem of depending only on local resources. However, this capability requires the project manager and team members to have a solid grasp of groupware.¹

There are both advantages and disadvantages to remote teams when compared to co-located teams as illustrated in the table below.

Team Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Co-Located Teams	High levels of collaboration	Queuing inefficiencies
Remote Teams	Accessibility to needed skills Information repository	Communications Lack of “hall way” conversations

Table 1: Co-located Teams vs. Remote Teams

Queuing inefficiencies can occur within a matrix organization structure when skilled personnel are required to support many projects. The inefficiencies build up due to physical or mental transitions between the various projects. Functional managers must be especially sensitive to this phenomenon. See the figure below.²

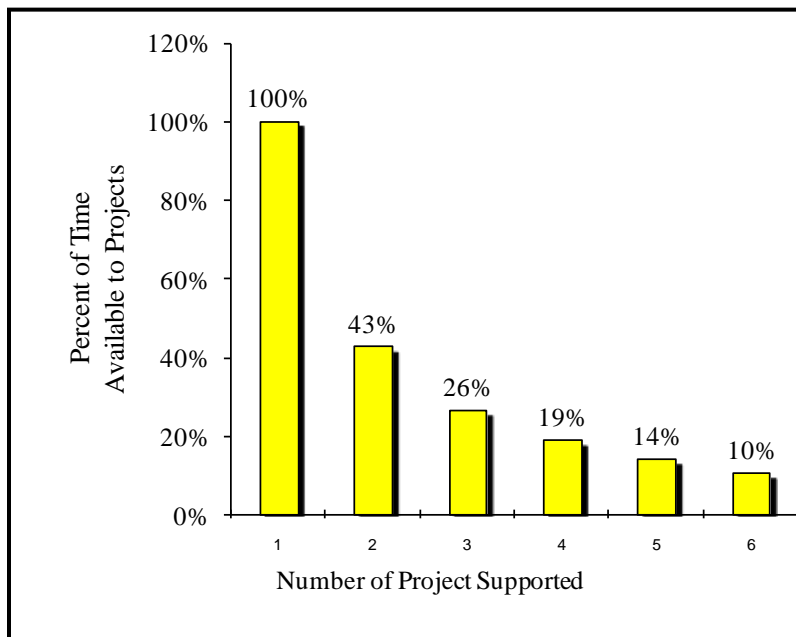


Figure 1: Queuing Inefficiencies

¹ Various groupware applications can be found at www.projectmgt.com.

² Adapted from *Developing Products in Half the Time* by Preston G. Smith and Donald G. Reinertsen, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995), p. 121.

Seven Ways to Develop High-Performance Teams

In order for project managers to effectively develop their project teams as quickly as possible they must establish the following seven practices.

Teams Need a Clear Common Goal. Each team must have a clear goal that each understands the same way and has commitment to it by all team members. The goal, or purpose statement must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the overall project goal, and it must contain a timeline.

Teams Need a Specific Performance Challenge. Teams that are not challenged will not work synergistically. While the goal must be achievable it must also stretch the team in such a way that they cannot meet it by working alone as individuals. Only when a goal is beyond their individual grasps will they see the need to work together. Synergy comes from having a specific performance challenge.

Teams Need the Ability to Manage Agreement. If all team members do not contribute to problem solving and decision making, teams will inevitably make poor decisions. It is not uncommon for some team members to steer the team by dominance, pushing their own views and hindering those of others. This is clearly demonstrated in the Abilene Paradox³ where the group did exactly the opposite of what they wanted to do. Teams need to manage agreement, and if they are unable to do so, the project manager must provide needed coaching and mentoring.

Teams Need Participative Management. If team members are not part of the project planning process they will not become committed to the project or the project team. Project managers must be sensitive to the Thorndike Effect and its tendency to make all project decisions autocratically. Even though it takes less time for a project manager to plan a project single-handedly, it will take longer to implement the plan because of a lack of team member commitment. Participative management ensures that all expert considerations have been incorporated into the project planning process, and as a result, full commitment to the project will take place.

Teams Need to Conduct Efficient Team Meetings. Studies have shown that a typical meeting attendee views them as being 2.3 times as long as they should be. Since meetings are vital to a project's success, the secret lies in simply making them more efficient. For team meetings to be effective and efficient the following practices must be enforced.⁴

³ Jerry B. Harvey, *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1988).

⁴ For more on this see, "How to Conduct Better Meetings" [www.projectmgt.com].

- Inform and remind team of purpose just before meeting.
- Minimize participants.
- Establish and follow an agenda.
- State the purpose and intended outcome.
- Attempt to involve each team member.
- Use diagrams, pictures and graphics.
- Park important but unrelated topics.
- Record action items, actionees, and due dates.
- Issue a brief written meeting summary.
- Periodically measure the effectiveness of the project meetings.

Teams Need a Clear Definition of Success. The team goal may be viewed as a “dot.” This means that it is an ideal budget, an ideal schedule and ideal scope. However, most teams will not complete their portion of the project exactly on time, or on budget, nor will they complete the precise scope of work they intended to accomplish. Does this mean they failed? Probably not. In addition to the “dot” (goal) teams also need a “circle.” The circle represents the amount of acceptable variance between the goal and how close the team comes to it. The circle represents the success criteria. For example, it may be acceptable for the team to finish with two weeks of its target completion date. Success criteria keeps the team motivated when it knows that it is going to miss the dot. Examples of success criteria can be found at www.projectmgt.com.

Teams Need Recognition When Performance is Exceptional. Recognition and rewarding of exceptional work is often overlooked. As a result, when many individuals who go beyond what is expected of them are ignored, discouragement can set in, and they soon drop back into doing mediocre work. To counter this, project managers must be on the alert for those who do exceptional work and recognize it appropriately. Alfie Kohn, in “Punished by Rewards” provides valuable insights into proper recognition and rewarding of exceptional employees.⁵

PROJECT PROCUREMENT AND OUTSOURCING

When make-or-buy decisions dictate outsourcing portions of the project, it is necessary that project managers have well prepared procurement management plans.

⁵ Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

Prior to the execution phase of a project all necessary efforts should be made to establish procurement management teams and required request-for-proposals. These request-for-proposals are sent to potential bidders who are to be evaluated and selected.

It is important that project planning incorporate all resources necessary for outsourcing including the negotiated outsourced cost, schedule, and scope of work. It should also include resources needed for the internal procurement management team(s).