

Project Management

Reaction Paper

Project Management Characteristics

by Timothy Simmons

## Reaction Paper

### Project Management Characteristics

I have decided to write my to a number of smaller articles dealing mainly with project management (PM) and new corporate culture. I will be using ideas gathered from a number of PM books and other literature both in German and English that I have researched to help me formulate good reactions. Reacting intelligently to some of the articles required me to do a little research into the subject matter, an approach that I have never used before. I don't remember ever writing a reaction paper before, so I hope that my readers will enjoy the work that I have done here.

#### **Reaction to: "Small Projects Big Results," by Karan M. Kroll**

I think the worst thing you could do when you are managing small projects is just to dive right in without any prior planning. Although there are seasoned project managers that feel comfortable doing that very thing, this article explains to us how important it is for novice project managers to use the PM tools to ensure the success of their projects. Keep in mind that small projects are often used as a training ground for larger ones, and if you fail on a small project there is not much left to prove yourself with.

No matter how large a project is, it is important to know exactly what the definition of its success is. This article instructs us that we need to manage the scope of all projects and have a detailed definition of what the client wants before we start planning. In order to have complete control of the project we must: establish the goal, define the scope, and develop a schedule and budget. During my research I found that many PM literatures proclaim that communicating a clear and detailed description of the project scope is one way to avoid scope creep, and that even seemingly small projects,

where the scope is not managed, have the tendency to become a project manager's nightmare.

This article also explains that often when project team members are given tasks in small projects they tend to give less care to the small projects in favor of other daily activities or larger projects. A good way it says to keep motivation up is to schedule small regular daily meetings lasting as long as 30 minutes or so to keep the team members progressing. I do something similar to this in my U.S. Army Reserve unit, to keep my soldiers motivate – without even knowing I was using a PM tool.

I don't have a clue how companies completed projects before PM became so popular. Even though I have no real experience in PM, I have more respect for this subject now that I have been researching it. I can see the benefits of using PM tools to do even the smallest of projects. For this reason I declare that I will use PM tools anywhere possible from now on.

To demonstrate my point I will refer to one of the case problems we do in the text, "Looking for a Job" (Bunin, 2005). Who would have guessed that we could use PM tools for something as apparently simple as looking for a job? In this example, it's not until we actually look at the scope of such a project that we see how PM tools can be used to make certain that it is done within time and cost restraints.

**Reaction to: "Project Planning a Step by Step Guide," by Duncan Haughey**

Mr. Haughey explains the different steps to conduct successful projects, and in step one, "Project Goals" he explains how important it is to find all of the stakeholders who are directly or indirectly impacted by the project. I feel that he should have emphasized this a little more.

In order to illustrate all of the stakeholders in a project I would use a table like the one suggested by Sabine Peipe in her book, *Crashkurs Projektmanagement* (Project Management Crash Course) (2003), this table lists: all the stakeholders, their amount of influence, the type of influence positive or negative, and any measures that would prevent hindrances or promote more support.

As Mr. Haughey suggests, conducting interviews with all stakeholders you could find out what their needs and concerns are so that a clear set of goals can be added to the project plan. I suppose that interviewing those stakeholders that might have a negative impact on the project could be a good way to address them personally and try to turn negative conceptions into cooperation and support. It might be that they just need to be informed about the benefits of the completed project. In a case where competition is one of the negative stakeholders; having a good marketing strategy by doing detailed market analysis is one of the best ways to calculate the market value of a new innovative product.

In step four: "Supporting Plans," Mr. Haughey explains that risk management plans are often overlooked. Peipe (2003) performs risk management similar to the US Department of Defense who: identifies the hazards or risks, categorizes them according to their probability and severity, develops control measures, and makes any eventual changes. The best practice I think would be during the planning phase of the project, use brainstorming or mind mapping to think up possible hindrances, recording them all no matter how absurd, this is better than waiting until something goes wrong with the project and then trying to fix it afterward.

I believe that the project plan is the most important step to ensuring that a project is successful. Guidelines for conducting a project plan should be part of an

organization's "Project Handbook" (Peipe, 2003) – a guide, where everything an organization uses for its projects should be kept.

**Reaction to: "Communication: The Lifeblood of a Project," by Ann  
Drinkwater**

This article talks about the importance of looking beyond a good communications plan and dig even deeper to find possible hidden expectations of the stakeholders. It is important not only to think about the documents that make up a communications plan, but also to look past the ink on paper. Get to know all of the individuals involved with the project more intimately to find any objectives that they would like to achieve.

I have noticed while being a leader, whether as a sergeant in an army or as a project manager, using effective communication sets the stage for success. Knowing how to communicate timely information to the right person, team member, stakeholder, sponsor, or client is as important as the information itself (Portny, 2007, pg.200). This means we have to be able to filter through information to put together reports, presentations, and other products that are tailored to a specific person. This is a skill that everyone in PM are behooved to learn.

**Reaction to: "The Difference Between Typical Project Management and Six  
Sigma Project Management," by Peter Peterka**

This article tries to put Six Sigma projects and traditional projects in the same bowl and look at their differences, I find this similar to sorting out the A's from the Z's in a bowl of alphabet soup. I believe the article does a good job of showing some differences. The only problem is if you don't know much about Six Sigma methodology this article will loose you.

Sigma is the Greek lowercase letter –  $\sigma$  – and stands for standard deviation. This deviation describes the amount of variation that exists in a set of data or a in a process. Sigma levels of performance are calculations of the various amounts of defects per million opportunities. Six Sigma is the highest sigma level, which is equal to 3.4 defects per million opportunities (Pande, Pete, & Holpp, Larry, 2007, pg. 6). Six Sigma projects are normally selected from need to fix certain processes; these needs are mostly generated by an observation that these old or legacy processes within an organization need to be streamlined to operate more effectively.

The way I see it, many Six Sigma projects have the tendency to switch to traditional projects once the Six Sigma Black Belts are finished with the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) process(Pande, 2007 pg. 40). Afterward the project is sold to the managers and approved, and then the project responsibilities are handed off to those who do the day-to-day work.

I would suggest we should use Six Sigma qualified teams for all projects, but due to the giftedness of those selected to be Six Sigma team members, and the diversity of the many different projects, this will rarely be seen.

#### **Reaction to: “On the Edge,” by Sarah Fister Gale**

Even though this article doesn't say anything specifically about Ford Motor Co. using Six Sigma management processes in their development of the new Edge CUV; I believe this article shows some examples of how Ford's designers used CTQs (critical to quality) to rework some of its research and development processes.

Doyle Letson, chief designer for the Edge, says that the Edge's designers went to costumers' homes and interviewed them about their lifestyles. Using what they learnt in their interviews with the costumers they used small homely touches like the rich wood

grain and metal-finish trim pieces which mimicked the furniture they saw in costumers' houses. On top of that they added one of the most difficult design features of the Edge, the two-pieced sunroof, because the costumers liked a lot of natural light filtering into their living spaces. This is clear evidence that a lot of Six Sigma changes are happening within the ranks of this enormous automobile producer.

I am sure that costumer satisfaction has always been one of Ford's utmost design priorities, but sending a bunch of designers and engineers to costumers' houses to snoop around and ask questions is a new approach. As far as I know doing something like that would be part of the marketing analysis work done by the marketing department. This type of devotion to costumer satisfaction shows the changes Six Sigma can have in an organization.

This reaction paper project was very challenging to me. I discover that there are so many aspects to PM, everything from leadership, team selection, project planning, effective communications and timely reporting, to the enjoyment of seeing the long awaited results of a finished project unfold in front of you. This reaction paper has given me the opportunity to research a lot of these different aspects of PM, and even learn a little more about the new corporate culture – Six Sigma. I think I would like one day to become a qualified PM professional, it sounds very challenging and exciting – it's right up my alley.

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