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The Disciplined Approach to Project Management

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The study and practice of the project management discipline appears to be ranking very high on the list of valuable employee skill sets with senior management these days. With the unrelenting speed of today's business markets, ever shrinking resource levels, and the complexity of business relationships, the discipline of Project Management may well be in the initial throws of its halcyon days. This is rather refreshing for someone like me, who, raised by engineering and construction archetypes, was introduced to an organized and disciplined approach to planning and executing work very early on. It is rewarding to have the opportunity to train and educate these new Project Managers and see their sense of respect for the tools of the discipline.



Along with this sense of reward comes a fair level of frustration as well. The frustration comes from hearing the same reports from many of these new project management trainees as to how their superiors really aren't bought into the Project Management mindset yet. Statements such as, "yeah, that's a nice bit of estimating and scheduling, but, do it the way I told you," or, "Hmm, I can see by your well thought out CPM schedule that the project will require a 45 week duration... well you have 32 weeks, so you better get going."

These accounts are almost always accompanied by a look of total helplessness on the face of the one imparting the scenario. With the ball then being hit into their court, the student looks to me for the solution to the pain. My answer in these cases is consistent and usually met with the same look of distress when they realize that there is no easy answer to this problem now plaguing the project management field. The only answer is perseverance.

Those of us who have been in the project management field long enough to know that it really does work, also understand that having the academic requirements under our belt is only the first step. The real proving ground of project management is in the project environment. A project environment may be very supportive or rather hostile. Continually applying the tools of project management will, over a period of time, build respect, not only for the Project Manager, but for the discipline as well. Have faith. There are companies out there that are actually utilizing Project Management in concert with strategic planning to assess corporate project capability prior to engaging in a lengthy planning process and ensuing kickoff, only to find out, rather quickly and after many a dollar spent, that their organization could not execute the project.

Although these companies are currently few and far between, and the majority still insists on the "reverse engineering" approach, i.e., give the customer the end date and then plan the project backward from there. It only takes catching the attention of the right placed individual and things can start to turn around. Unfortunately, Kerzner's alternative to planning is still not far off the mark:

- Initiate the project
- Wild enthusiasm
- Chaos and disillusionment
- A search for the guilty
- Punish the innocent
- Promote the non-participants
- Then... Plan the Project.

If project management is to prevail over this type of approach, we as practitioners must be willing to undertake it as a discipline. A discipline is an endeavor that requires consistent effort, practice and mindfulness in order to perfect. The Japanese word for discipline is Shugyo (Shoo-gee-o), and implies a constant maximum effort with the rewards coming slowly over time. This approach, coupled with the tools of project management, brings forth the kind of consistent results that attract attention. With perseverance we can begin to shift the mindset of those who would rather have us take the adhoc path to achieving successful project results.

For more information regarding this topic we can be contacted via phone or e-mail at info@amsconsulting.com