

PROJECT MANAGEMENT – Some home truths (2)

The project sponsor and project leader are in pensive mood as they sit in the project war room on New Year's Eve and realise that that 31 December milestone is not going to happen...

"Shame the team are not here isn't it, especially when it is so nice and quiet with no one around. I bet most of them are off partying somewhere" the sponsor sighed ruefully...

"All apart from my trusted lieutenant right here that is" the eager project leader replied...

"Well yes, it's good to have old Shep on board, and I especially like the fact that he does not talk back but you've got to admit he is a bit limited when it comes to the system testing we needed to do to achieve this milestone..."



"Good point. Now pass me that bottle and let's see if a drink or two can help us to remember what made us

think that 31 December was ever going to be a valid date for a milestone.....and come to think of it, why did we have that other milestone falling due in the middle of the annual maintenance shutdown? Maybe there are other lessons here for us all about planning a project?"

Truth Two – Mobilise well, a great start matters!

Assuming there is a clear and compelling case for doing the project (see truth one – there is never a

right way of doing the wrong thing), it is essential to mobilise the project but what is mobilisation exactly? What does it involve? How do you know if you have done it well?

Certainly this is not the time to follow the example of the project manager who organised a project team mobilisation meeting; invited people by email without explaining their expected role in the project; failed to book the equipment needed; had no essential materials prepared nor agenda planned; and then proceeded to lecture the team on the importance of thinking ahead! This project was thereafter nicknamed Project Hoover (because it sucked) and needless to say it failed miserably.

Effective mobilisation should be seen not as an event but a process for ensuring that the following conditions for effective mobilisation are met:

- the project **team** is well formed, with common purpose, and is able and committed to project success
- there is a clear common understanding by team members and among key stakeholders about the project scope, the end goal and the outcomes required for success
- robust plans are in place for making this happen, including a sound milestone plan with milestones that are significant, measurable, have a specific and valid complete by date, and an individual project team member accountable for the delivery of each.
- risks and dependencies are identified and begun to be actively managed

- stakeholder management and communication plans are in place
- progress reporting and review methods are agreed and fit for purpose.
- relationships are built and some investment is made in forming a team that can begin to rely on each other
- ground rules on how the team want to work together are co-created

Clearly to achieve the above takes more than a single kick-off workshop but, that said, physically getting the team together is important and needs to be thought through and run well. This means allowing sufficient time for people to question, discuss challenges and solutions and use their expertise and experience to co-create and begin to own **their** project plan. Since it is difficult to be committed to something that you have not been involved in, the actual process of building plans together enables much deeper understanding and

greater commitment. So even if plans have been developed before the team mobilisation event takes place, these should be offered up for debate rather than communicated as a done deal..

So when you are next leading a project and looking to mobilise, please don't send people an email to say "welcome on board". Talk to each person individually about the project objectives, why it matters to have them personally on board, the role they can play and their initial thoughts on how best to go about the task.

When organising a mobilisation event, think about how well people know each other and you, invite any contractors/external resource integral to project delivery and make them part of the team from the off, and use a process that engages people as much as possible. Of course as every project is a step into the unknown, while there will be a need to share background and other information and to be clear about project objectives, scope and deliverables, try not to let the desire for certainty stop issues from being acknowledged and explored.

Ideally you should have the Project Sponsor along to a kick-off meeting to help set the business context and to share their expectations and underline their personal commitment to the project. If they cannot make it for whatever reason, then have the sponsor do a video to show at the event. In the You Tube era this is easily done and says a lot about the importance of the project itself.

The focus should be on tying down the project objectives and scope (i.e. what is in and what is out of scope, what the project team will do and will not do) and building a milestone plan. I believe wholeheartedly that, above all else, effectively setting and managing by milestones is the key to successful project management, and so in the next issue of Sense from Sensei I will explore milestone planning more fully.

Meanwhile, as the project manager and sponsor drown their sorrows and feel wiser for their reflections, Shep is busy putting on his chauffeur hat and gloves and standing ready as always to drive them home...

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