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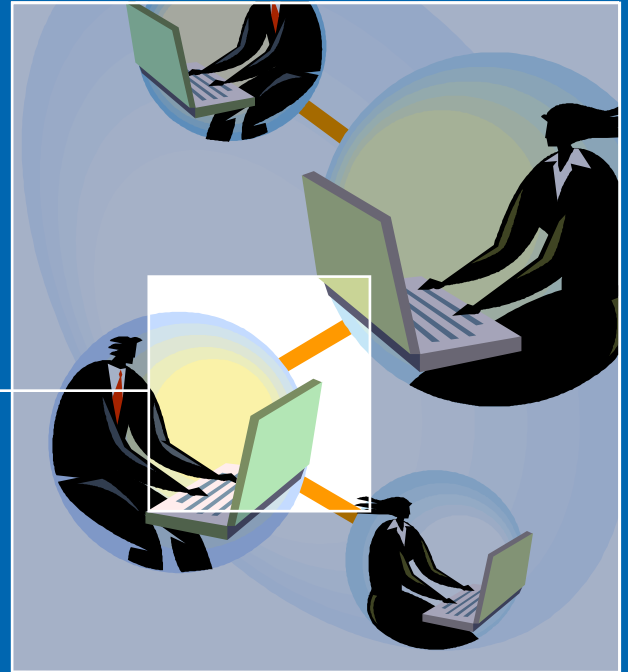## Blue Papers

Beginners Guide to Project Management

Project Management Practices:
Beyond the To-Do List

"Plans are useless but planning is indispensable."

- Dwight D Eisnehower

No doubt you've heard these maxims before: Plan the work, work the plan; fail to plan, plan to fail; it's not the plan that's important, it's the planning. And, beyond being well-known quotes, they happen to sum up the essence of project management.

What comes to mind when you think of project management? Do you think of long, boring meetings or endless checklists? Or maybe you think of Gantt charts and schedules? Whatever it makes you think about, effective project management is critical to the success of any project. As noted by international consulting firm MM Identity Lab:

"Although project management is often overlooked in the creative process - it's the driving force behind every venture. Effective project management can push a project to the fullest of its potential, creating work that surpasses the wildest of expectations. On the other hand, poor project management can stall productivity, stifle creativity, or kill a project entirely."[1]

Before you start an important project, it will certainly help if you know what you're doing and where you're going: the detail, the planning. And that's where project management comes in.

Think of your project as a garden. If you want to grow fresh vegetables, you have to plan it properly and know when and where to plant the seeds. Then you have to take care of it, and that means you have to weed, water and protect it from garden pests. Consider project management as a tool that you use to manage your garden. It helps to create a plan for planting, watering and weeding so you can enjoy the fruits of your labour. Without it, things might look rosy in the garden but it will, over time turn to an ugly mess of weeds with no edible vegetables in sight.

Fast Company printed an article on project management that provides a good starting point. Entitled 'What the hell is project management anyway?'[2] it talks

1 Crissy Saint. "Ideas and Insights." The Importance of Project Management. MM Identity Lab. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://mmidentitylab.com/2013/04/the-importance-of-project-management
2 Kevin Purdy. "What The Hell Is Project Management, Anyway? Fast Company Business Innovation." Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.fastcompany.com/1822525/what-hell-project-management-anyway

about how project management has evolved from something that people did without much direction in the 1980s into a modern-day mantra that is the focus of a considerable amount of technology and literature. But really, the concept of project management hasn't changed in all those decades. It simply infuses common sense into managing a project by defining goals, milestones and timelines. It draws on the basic logic that if you don't create a plan to outline where you are going, implement it, and monitor outcomes along the way, you probably won't get where you wanted to go. Like weeding and watering your garden, it has to be done.

Without wishing to be negative, there's usually a lot to be learned from case studies where things went wrong, so let's highlight a few examples from around the world. Concorde, one of only two supersonic jet aeroplanes to have entered commercial service, was a joint collaboration between the governments of the United Kingdom and France. In terms of both cost and time the project was a complete failure, having received so much investment that it became impossible to terminate. However, the long-term goal of both nations was not a commercial return but an attempt to create a European aligned aerospace industry, which 30 years later is beginning to bear fruit. Whilst the nations involved survived this project, a commercial organisation would most certainly not have done.[3]

In 2003, Sainsbury's, the popular grocery store chain, installed a barcode system designed to increase efficiency and streamline operations. Due to improper planning and testing, the system was eventually abandoned and resulted in a loss of around £165 million. Experts found that ineffective project management was the cause of the failure. If the company had properly used project management to handle problems in the earlier stages of the project, failure might have been avoided.[4]

Of course, there is also the project management nightmare that occurred in 1990 with the $3 billion Hubble Space Telescope. After spending 15 years building the telescope and launching it into space, it was discovered that there was a flaw in the optical system that should have been caught earlier.[5] Charles Pellerin, the project manager and NASA's director of astrophysics, was in charge of the project, and has since written a book on why the project failed.

3 R Court. 'Integrated Management' CIMA Global. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.cimaglobal.com/Documents/ImportedDocuments/fm_june06_p41-42.pdf

4 N Nayab. "Project Management Horror Stories." Brighthub Project Management. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.brighthubpm.com/monitoring-projects/15893-lessons-we-can-learn-from-three-project-management-horror-stories

5 Rohan Pearce. "What Went Wrong with the Hubble Space Telescope." CIO. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.cio.com.au/article/420036/what_went_wrong_hubble_space_telescope_what_managers_can_learn_from_it_

This Blue Paper examines effective project management practices. What is the project management process? What are some of the roles and resources needed to make a project successful? How can you make the most of the tools that are available on the internet? This paper answers these questions and provides a roadmap for success. By following a few tips and leveraging some of the resources on the internet, you can help to boost your chances of project management success, and make sure you end up where you need to be.

What is project management anyway?

According to Wikipedia, project management is 'the discipline of planning, organising, motivating, and controlling resources to achieve specific goals.'[6] Project management is applied to a project, and that can be anything with a defined beginning and end that is undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives.[7] A project is also identified as a temporary group activity designed to produce a unique product, service or result. Project management is usually overseen by the project manager (PM), who is responsible for making sure everything is done on time within budget and with the right level of resources.

The Project Management Institute (PMI)[8] is a well-known leader in project management methods and tools. It is one of the world's largest not-for-profit membership associations for project management professionals and provides access to a number of tools and research to assist with project management. According to PMI, project management is: 'The application of knowledge, skills and techniques to execute projects effectively and efficiently. It's a strategic competency for organisations, enabling them to tie project results to business.'[9]

PMI developed the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) that was written in the 1990s and has since become the de-facto 'Bible' of PM.[10] Now in its third edition since 2004, it has evolved into 37 official steps to guide professionals through proper project management. It's a great starting point for anyone who wants to learn more about effective project management methods and tools. It's applicable to a wide range of markets (e.g. construction, software, engineering, automotive) and is cross-functional to include multiple departments such as IT, operations, and services.

6   "Project Management." Wikipedia. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_management
7   "Project Management." Wikipedia. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_management
8   Project Management Institute. Web 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmi.org/default.aspx
9   "What Is Project Management?" PMI. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmi.org/About-Us/About-Us-What-is-Project-Management.aspx
10 Kevin Purdy. "What The Hell Is Project Management, Anyway? Fast Company Business Innovation." Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.fastcompany.com/1822525/what-hell-project-management-anyway

Sounds easy, right? Not so fast. The challenge of project management is to achieve the desired goals while keeping an eye on any potential barriers to success and mitigating risks. Challenges arise in a number of areas, including scope, time, quality and budget. Maybe you can't account for everything, but you can have plans in place that can help to reduce the opportunities for failure. You've probably heard that effective project management is about people, time and money. While that's true, the fourth element, scope, is perhaps the most important, because any change to the project's scope impacts on time, resources and budget.[11]

For example, pretend that you are the PM for a home building project. You've built your project plan around a single-storey house of approximately 1000 square feet. Let's assume that the client approves the plan, with the small addition of a loft. Even though it's a relatively small request, it could have a big impact on the timeline, budget and resources. As the PM it's your responsibility to adjust the project timeline to factor in the additional time required to build the loft, amend the budget to purchase additional materials, and hire any additional resources needed to build the loft. Failure to accommodate for these changes will almost certainly mean that you run over budget and behind schedule.

Now let's assume that you're halfway into the project, and the client decides to extend the loft and build a second-storey to the house. What began as a small change is now much bigger, in fact, it's doubling the size of the structure and the project. This could be characterised as 'scope creep,' where suddenly the project becomes much larger than anticipated. The PM must go back to the drawing board to factor in the additional costs, time and resources required to build the house.

Project management is also about managing expectations and preparing for things that happen which are beyond your control. Using the home building example, say there is a storm that stops work on site for a few days, a familiar scenario to anyone who has ever watched the Channel 4 series 'Grand Designs.' An effective timeline takes things like this into consideration, and has contingency plans that allow for adjustments. In short, there's a lot that goes into project management. Let's explore the project management process and the five process areas of a project.

11 "Project Management 101." About.com Management. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://management.about.com/cs/projectmanagement/a/PM101.htm

Project management process

There are many ways to approach project management, but generally, most project management approaches follow five key steps.[12] The PMBOK Guide (and other process tools) outlines five key process groups to aid in project delivery. These include:

1. Initiating
2. Planning
3. Executing
4. Monitoring and Controlling
5. Closing

The following diagram shows the project management process in its basic form. As shown, there is continuous flow between planning and design, monitoring and controlling, and project execution. That's because as the project unfolds, each of these areas must be reviewed to accommodate for changes in scope, time or budget.
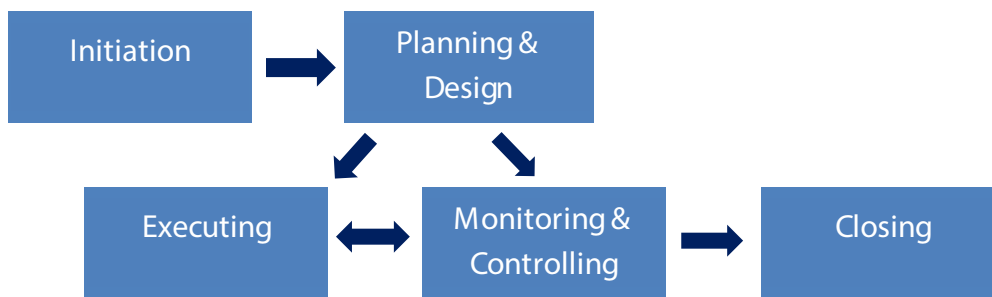
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│  Initiation │ ───▶   │ Planning &  │
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│             │   │  Controlling  │        │             │
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Figure 1. Project Management Process

In order to fully understand the project management process, it's a good idea to explore each of these phases in detail.

In the first phase, **project initiation,** a project is outlined and fully explored. This phase asks key questions such as:

- What are the project goals?

- Is the project feasible?

- Who are possible partners for this project?

12 Mary Nestor-Harper. "Tasks in the Five Phases of Project Management." *Small Business. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.*
   http://smallbusiness.chron.com/tasks-five-phases-project-management-52690.html

- What are the expected project results?

- What are the boundaries of this project (what is outside the scope of the project)?

After the business case is established, a potential scope and outcome are identified. During this phase, feasibility testing may be conducted to determine whether or not the project is possible. Analysis and information gathering may also occur in this phase to determine whether or not resources and other factors are available to move forward.

In this phase, a **project charter** or proposal is developed. The charter or proposal outlines the business case for the project and fully defines project parameters. In other words, it provides an explicit agreement on the type of project that is being started and the outcomes that are expected. It also identifies the resources that might be needed to manage and implement the project. Resources can include people, technology and materials.

Planning & Design

In the second phase, **planning and design**, a comprehensive project management plan is developed to address cost, scope, time, quality, communication, risk and resources. This phase identifies the critical areas of the project, such as milestones, deadlines, important deliveries, modes of communication and schedules, to name a few. It is common to use a **work breakdown structure (WBS)** to identify and summarise key project milestones, or a Gantt chart to help plan a project.
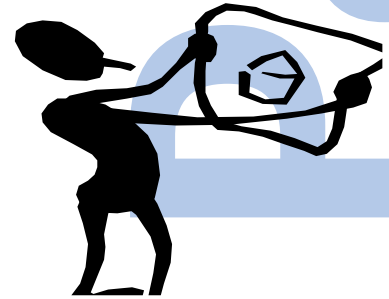
During this phase, the project scope is vetted by key stakeholders. This is where you fully define the product or service to be acquired and shape the strategy. **A scope statement** outlines the project and subdivides project deliverables into manageable components. It formalises the project scope and establishes processes to control changes to scope. It also fully defines and assigns resources (eg. people, technology, materials) that the project requires. This is also when a project determines if additional data, resources or expertise are needed to execute the project.

During the planning and design phase you should identify risk and risk mitigation strategies. Some projects develop a comprehensive list of potential risks, and assign a rating to each risk based on their likelihood and impact. Mitigation strategies are developed for risks that are likely and/or would significantly reduce project success.

Budgeting is another important activity during this phase. It's important to establish financial boundaries and stick to them. This phase estimates lifecycle and contingency costs and establishes processes to identify and manage cost variations. It's also important to establish a communication strategy during the second phase. Likewise, you need effective communication tools and methods for stakeholders and leaders to keep them engaged and on task. A communication plan will also help to prevent miscommunication or misaligned expectations. Projects should have a defined process to report and track changes to the project plan, timelines and actual costs against budget.

Executing

In the **executing** phase, a deliverable is developed and completed according to the plan outlined in the planning stage. This phase relies heavily on inputs from status meetings, project development updates, status reports and performance reports to make sure things flow as intended. A project manager (PM) oversees all aspects of the project and monitors cost, timeline and resources.

During the executing phase, the PM spends a considerable amount of time making sure that all resources (including people, equipment and materials) are available and able to complete the assigned task. This is an area where project management software and technology is particularly helpful. As discussed in subsequent sections, there are a number of tools on the market that can help managers and teams to keep track of project details and deadlines.

Status meetings and project development updates should occur on a regular basis in order to ensure that the project stays on track and team members are aware of deadlines and expectations. It is also common to hold steering committee and quality review meetings to make sure the project is continuing in the right direction.

Monitoring & Controlling

Project monitoring and controlling is the phase that measures project performance against a project management plan. In other words, is the project on time and within budget? Monitoring often occurs in tandem with the execution phase to avoid 'scope creep' and manage changes to project requirements. This is the phase that introduces any corrective measures that may be required to keep a project on track. Some models combine monitoring with executing (see Figure 2 because there is frequently a significant amount of overlap between these phases.

Since project phases like executing and monitoring have overlapping tasks that occur at the same time, it's important to actually incorporate significant changes as they occur into the existing plan. 'Scope creep' refers to changes in scope that initially seem small but have a big impact on timeline, budget or other project elements. In some cases, these changes are not properly reviewed and documented, and the project team is expected to deliver the project with the same resources and timeframe as defined by the original scope.

To avoid scope creep, it's important that all project changes are tracked and communicated. That way, if multiple changes push back the timeline, project team members are aware of the impact it may have to resources and budget. It's important to set expectations early on and educate the team about scope creep. According to the Enterprise Project Management Office at Georgia Regents University, successful projects "mention the elephant in the room and acknowledge that scope creep is possible."[13]

Closing

Every project has a formal ending. **Closing** is the final phase that marks the conclusion of the project. Although it's often overlooked, it's an important part of the process. During this phase, the team creates a list of items, or a list of open points (LOP) that need to be resolved for future projects or long term project health. The team often prepares a final presentation of project results for key stakeholders. It's also common to generate a final project report that can be shared with the organisation, customer or team members. Closing means that project accounts are closed and the final project cost is calculated. Finally, when all objectives are met, it's time to relieve the project team from further obligation. This is an opportunity for project leaders to reward and recognise team members and celebrate the success of the project.
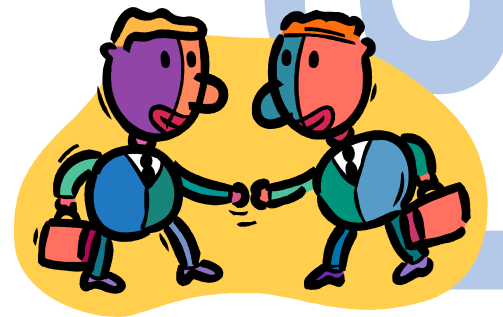
Figure 2 shows the deliverables that are associated with each project phase. It also provides a visual summary of what is described in the section above. In this model, project execution and control are combined into one phase. This is a common approach because of the continuous loop that occurs between execution and control.

13 "How to Manage Scope Creep – and Even Prevent It From Happening." Liquid Planner. Web. 16 Dec 2014. http://www.liquidplanner.com/blog/manage-scope-creep-even-prevent-happening/

Figure 2: Detailed project management process graphic[14]

There are plenty of resources to walk you through the basics of project management. A good starting point might be TutorialsPoint.com[15] which offers free tutorials and reference manuals with examples for all project management phases. ProjectManager.com[16] also offers free webinars on project management methods to help you get started. There are specific tutorials on defining scope, managing time and tracking projects. You can even find information on how to manage project teams and communication. Finally, Project Management KnowHow[17] provides checklists of items to consider during each project management phase. Each of these tools provide more detail on how to oversee the process.

Project management roles

Every project has several resources working toward the same goal: project success. Sponsors, PMs and team members play critical roles that impact the likelihood for success. Other resources, such as subject matter experts, provide input on feasibility and scope, and offer insight during the project lifespan.

A **project sponsor** is the individual who commissions the project and provides resources and support. The sponsor is the official champion of the effort and

14 *MindManager Project Jetpack. Mindjet. Web 16 Dec. 2014.* http://blog.mindjet.com/2011/02/managing-projects-with-mindmanager-just-got-easier/

15 *Project Management Processes. Tutorialpoint. Web 16 Dec. 2014.* http://www.tutorialspoint.com/management_concepts/project_management_processes.htm

16 *Free Project Management Webinars. projectmanager.com. Web 16 Dec. 2014.* http://www.projectmanager.com/project-management-webinar

17 *Project Management Processes. Project Management Knowhow. Web 16 Dec. 2014.* http://www.project-management-knowhow.com/project_management_process.html

supports the project at a high level. Sponsors are usually senior staff members who are responsible for an area that will be impacted by the project outcome and success. Sponsors are involved in the project from start to finish and help to define the project in its earliest stages. During the project, a sponsor evaluates progress at key project milestones. Sponsors rely on the PM to oversee the day-to-day details of the project.

The **project manager** (PM) is the individual responsible for making sure that the project is delivered on time and within budget. Accordingly, a PM is tasked with a number of key responsibilities, including resource allocation and the overall team management. The PM oversees project details on a day-to-day basis and reports key activities to project stakeholders and sponsors.

Team members are those who actively work on the project. Team member roles vary depending on the type of project, but overall, their job is to execute the project plan. Team members may provide functional expertise or work with users to ensure that the project meets business needs. A team member may also document and analyse project development throughout the project lifecycle.

A project may also have a **project coordinator** or administrator who serves as a liaison between team members and the PM. A project coordinator might maintain the project plan, update the project website and timelines, or provide basic administrative support to the PM. A project coordinator is often assigned to help manage large, cross-functional projects.

Subject matter experts (SME) provide technical advice to project sponsors and managers. While managers and sponsors focus on goals and desired outcomes, SMEs play a critical role in helping them to understand what is possible and realistic. SME's are often consulted to help define scope, timeline and budget, and are involved in the project lifecycle. While project sponsors and managers define parameters and goals, the SME is the one who determines feasibility and likelihood for success. SME's offer technical advice and provide strategic input and review as well as documenting findings throughout the project.

The project manager

Project implementation is a team effort; all players work towards the same goal. However, as you've probably gathered, the role of the **project manager** is critical to the success of a project. Without defined (and strong) leadership, the success of a project is considerably diminished.

According to the Project Management Talent Gap Report produced by the Project

Management Institute, 15.7 million new project management roles will be added globally within the next decade.[18] Some of the skills required for project management include effective decision-making, good listening skills and the ability to motivate others. Effective communication, conflict-resolution, negotiation and organizational skills are also attributes of a good project manager.

Most experts agree that the ability to engage in strong decision-making is the most important attribute of a PM As noted:

"Of all project manager skills, the ability to make important business decisions is perhaps the most valuable. Strong decision-making skills are necessary to weigh the available options and choose the best course of action. Indecisiveness or poor decisions can put the brakes on a project."[19]

A survey conducted by the Top 500 Project Management Benchmarking Forum identified traits of a 'best practice' project manager. According to the study, the best PMs:

- are recognised by stakeholders as the single most important factor in project goal achievement
- are truthful in all dealings and relationships
- exhibit eagerness to organise and lead groups
- exhibit evidence of a strong desire for goal achievement
- are even-tempered
- have faith that the future will have a positive outcome
- have confidence that their personal performance will result in a positive outcome.[20]

Likewise, Debbie Bigelow Crawford from PM Solutions agrees that there are common traits exhibited by PMs. In her view, "the best project managers exhibit extraordinary energy levels, phenomenal political skills and an absolute obsession with results."[21] Good managers also excel at embracing challenges and possess strong team-building and interpersonal skills.

According to PMI, organisations that provide project management training have the most successful PMs and their "Researching the Value of Project
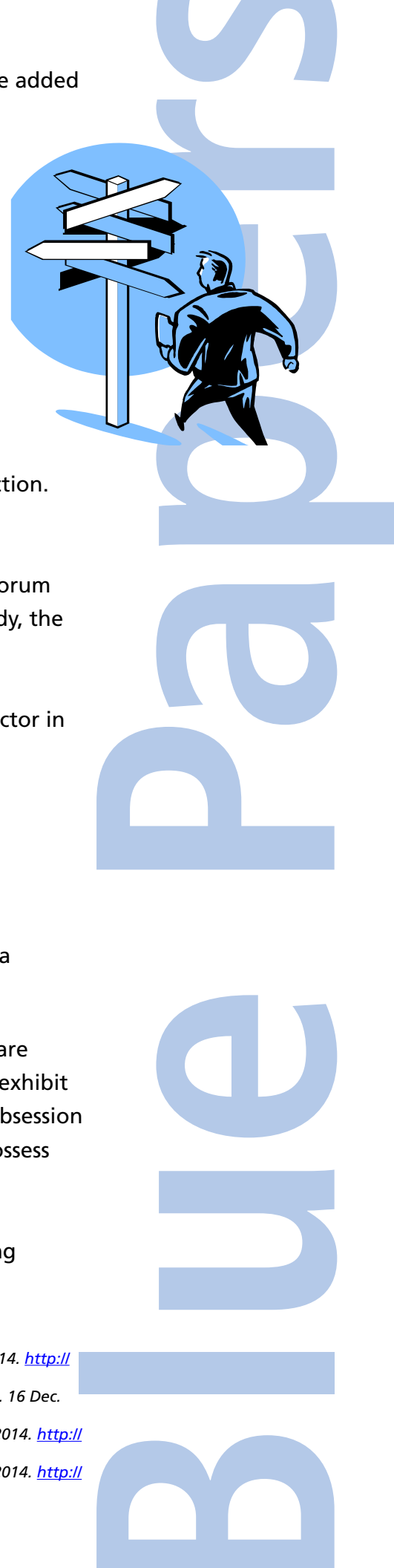
18 "PMI's Industry Growth Forecast." *Project Management between 2010 and 2020.* Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmi.org/~/media/PDF/Business-Solutions/PMIProjectManagementSkillsGapReport.ashx
19 "The Importance of a Decisive Project Manager." *Importance of a Decisive Project Manager.* Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.villanovau.com/importance-of-project-manager-decisiveness/
20 Debbie Bigelow Crawford. "What Makes a Good Project Manager?" *PM Solutions.* Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmsolutions.com/audio/Expert_Series_-_What_Makes_a_Good_Project_Manager.pdf
21 Debbie Bigelow Crawford. "What Makes a Good Project Manager?" *PM Solutions.* Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmsolutions.com/audio/Expert_Series_-_What_Makes_a_Good_Project_Manager.pdf

Management" study[22] revealed organisations that offer training are more efficient and better equipped for the challenges associated with project management. The training can be provided in-house or from an external company that specialises in project management, the key is to help project managers to understand what it takes to successfully manage projects and people, and give them a broader understanding of their responsibilities in the process.
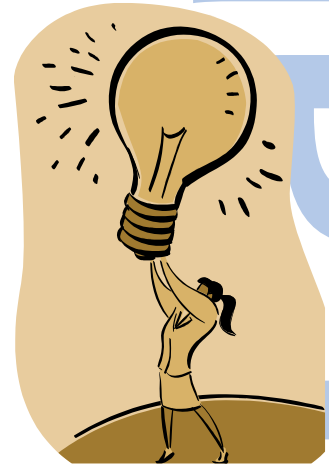
Make project management fun

Fun might be a stretch, but you can make it easier for your PMs to lead. According to Brad Egeland's blog on the website 'Project Management Tips' there are ways to make project management enjoyable. Specifically, to get the most from your PMs, Egeland suggests that companies adhere to the following principles:

- Give autonomy
- Focus resources
- Avoid micro-managing
- Provide some level of innovation
- Use cool technology
- Provide some technical hands-on[23]

Autonomy is important because when leaders feel like they have a large degree of freedom and discretion they are often more productive. In terms of resources, it's important to find skilled, focused resources with the skills required to do the job. Clearly, a PM who is given resources who can't handle the tasks required is certain to fail.

Micro-management can be the downfall of effective project management for almost any project. PM's do better when they are given the freedom to make key decisions that impact the project and team. If a PM feels like they are being micro-managed it may impact productivity and reduce team morale. Simply put, it's difficult to motivate a team if they feel like every move is likely to be questioned.

You may not associate project management with innovation, but if you want to keep employees engaged, it's best to provide opportunity for creativity and innovation. Most PMs enjoy a challenge and find projects that require out-of-the-box thinking more enjoyable. In turn, a PM can translate their enthusiasm to the

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22 *Researching the Value of Project Management Study. Project Management Institute. Web 16 Dec. 2014.* http://www.pmi.org/en/Business-Solutions/Talent-Management-Researching-Value-of-Project-Management-Study.aspx
23 *Brad Egeland "When Project Management Is Fun." Web. 16 Dec. 2014.* http://pmtips.net/project-management-fun

team to promote more creativity.

The technology you select for project management makes a difference. If it's fun and engaging, your team is more likely to use it. It also has to be easy to understand and use, so that your team can quickly adapt to using it.

Another way to make it fun is to give the PM some technical hands-on to the project. Instead of just managing resources and project deliverables, it's a good idea to give the project lead tasks that leverage his or her expertise and provide an opportunity to dive deeper into the project content. Research shows that even a little hands-on activity enhances buy-in and increases the enjoyment level of participation.

Best practices for effective project management

Tom Mochal's article '10 best practices for successful project management'[24] is certainly worth a read as it outlines the major phases of managing a project and discusses key steps for each:

1. Plan the work by creating a project definition document.
2. Create a planning horizon.
3. Define project management procedures up front.
4. Manage the work plan and monitor the schedule and budget.
5. Look for warning signs during the project.
6. Ensure that the sponsor approves scope-change requests.
7. Guard against scope creep.
8. Identify risks up front.
9. Continue to assess potential risks throughout the project.
10. Resolve issues as quickly as possible.[25]

One of the best practices in the article centres on the importance of planning and including key stakeholders in the process as early as possible. Addressing the needs and concerns of all interested parties is critical to gain buy-in to the process and ensure successful implementation. For example, if you are working on an information technology project, make sure you have the relevant programmers and designers engaged in the project at the early stages. You should also rely on SMEs to help define feasibility and feedback on realistic timelines and expectations. Likewise, if your project requires support from key stakeholders,

24 Tom Mochal. "10 Best Practices for Successful Project Management." TechRepublic. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10-things/10-best-practices-for-successful-project-management/
25 Tom Mochal. "10 Best Practices for Successful Project Management." TechRepublic. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10-things/10-best-practices-for-successful-project-management/

make sure important leaders are included in the planning process.

Another best practice suggests that organisations create a planning horizon for the project. A planning horizon is the length of time you can plan into the future with validity. It requires a full understanding of the resources needed to complete a project and the resources that are available to assist with the project. On YouTube you'll find a video "What is your project's planning horizon?"[26] created by Dr. James T. Brown that describes why you need a planning horizon and how you can best approach future planning. According to Dr. Brown "Every organization should establish a target project planning horizon based on the kinds of projects, customers, deliverables and services they provide."[27]

Managing the schedule is another important activity required to control a project, and that means diligently paying attention to timeline and budget. As previously mentioned, managing scope is so critical to success; best practice companies have measures in place to prevent scope creep from derailing a project. Similarly, one of the critical success factors is to make sure that the sponsor approves scope-change requests at key decision points.

Using a project dashboard to help manage a project is also best practice. Dashboards vary in appearance, but they are similar in the sense that they provide a graphical view of project status. It's a way for team members, sponsors and managers to view the current health of a project in real time. If something is amiss, a dashboard can help you locate the root cause and help managers adjust schedule and costs to get it back on track. You can use online software to develop a dashboard; a number of vendors provide applications designed to monitor projects during the lifecycle. ProjectManager.com, for example, has a variety of dashboards that can be customised to your project[28]. Depending on the complexity of the project, you could even use basic applications like Excel. The key is to provide a real time, ongoing assessment that allows project team members to see how a project is doing and whether or not it's on track.

Yet Arwen Heredia from Mindjet cautions about the value of so called 'best practices' in project management. What's a best practice at one organisation may not work at yours. She notes:

26 James T. Brown. "What Is Your Project's Planning Horizon?" YouTube. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDEWOuBBZUI

27 James T. Brown. "What Is Your Project's Planning Horizon?" YouTube. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDEWOuBBZUI

28 Project Dashboard. Projectmanager.com. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.projectmanager.com/project-dashboard.php

"How many times have you read a blog or article that claims to have vetted the thousands upon thousands of tips to come up with *the* definitive list of project management best practices? And how many times have those lists contained not-so-new advice, or made suggestions that just don't fit your organization?"[29]

According to Heredia, companies need to find their own best practices for project management. To start, Heredia claims that selecting the right PM and team is critical to success. Process is important, but she says that "guidelines don't mean much if the right person, possessing the appropriate skill set and vision for a project, isn't following them."[30] Although technology and tools are helpful, it's imperative to make sure that you've selected the right team to implement a project, because ultimately, 'a gifted project manager translates existing parameters into concepts that help maximise resources and realise the full potential of whatever project they're used for.'[31]

The concept and principles required for project management rarely change, it's the project itself that varies. Projects can be big, small, expensive or inexpensive. How you manage them is influenced by scope, budget and stakeholder preference. Often, the best management method is simply the one that will achieve positive results, and this can vary greatly depending on the individual project. Managers need to identify the critical components to success and adapt them to the organisation.

Project management technologies

There's no shortage of technology solutions that are available to help with project management. There are literally thousands of products and tools that claim to have the ability to help organise and track projects. Each (of course!) claiming to be the most effective tool on the market and as a result, selecting a technology can be overwhelming. It's wise to do some research before purchasing and implementing a tool, and keep in mind, there is no one-size fits all tool that is widely recommended. What you end up using depends on your project size, corporate culture and industry.

29 Arwen Heredia. *"Why Implementing Project Management Best Practices Means Something Different for Everyone." Mindjet Publication. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.* http://blog.mindjet.com/2013/04/implementing-project-management-best-practices-different-for-everyone/

30 Arwen Heredia. *"Why Implementing Project Management Best Practices Means Something Different for Everyone." Mindjet Publication. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.* http://blog.mindjet.com/2013/04/implementing-project-management-best-practices-different-for-everyone/

31 Arwen Heredia. *"Why Implementing Project Management Best Practices Means Something Different for Everyone." Mindjet Publication. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.* http://blog.mindjet.com/2013/04/implementing-project-management-best-practices-different-for-everyone/.

Project management for success

You've heard about what happens if project management fails, but how can effective project management have a positive impact on your organisation?

Debbie Bigelow Crawford cites an article in Compuworld that highlighted a project management success story about a senior manager of a Fortune 500 organisation. In the example the manager shared some of the difficulties in getting team buy-in to his programme of discipline, structure, tools, training and leadership. Eventually, after the staff adopted his project management methods, there was dramatic improvement. In fact, he and his team of 25 were able to reduce the project cycle time by 15 to 25% and cut personnel expenses by 10% annually while taking on bigger and more complex projects.[32] The lesson learned is that it's important to stay the course with project management. In other words, plan the work, and work the plan.
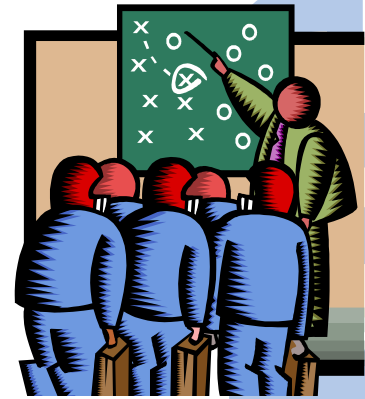
There's no set roadmap for effective project management, but if you do your homework, you can quickly determine what works best for your organisation and your specific projects. Take advantage of the resources and tools literally at your fingertips. Project management doesn't have to be hard work, but you do need to plan the work. And of course, work the plan.

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32 Debbie Bigelow Crawford. "What Makes a Good Project Manager?" PM Solutions. Web. 16 Dec. 2014. http://www.pmsolutions.com/audio/Expert_Series_-_What_Makes_a_Good_Project_Manager.pdf