

Project Management Forums: Building Consistency Out of Chaos

by Michael G. Martin, PMP



Have you ever felt as though you're constantly reinventing the wheel each time a new project is initiated? Even though you may have done a project similar in scope many times, it seems that you end up going through the same trials and tribulations you went through in the past. If you've ever felt like this, you're not alone. The absence of consistent project management (PM) methodologies and tools is often a trait of an immature organization that is either in the process of implementing project management, or doesn't have the executive sponsorship necessary to support the initiative.

Replacing the Chaos With Structure

So how do you go about building

consistent methodologies and tools within an organization that is either immature in its management approach, or doesn't have the executive support behind the concept to make it successful? One method I've found to be successful in achieving this objective is the implementation of a PM forum. The purpose of the PM forum is to bring together the various functional disciplines within an organization to build a consistent methodology and tool kit for managing projects.

Structure of the PM Forum

The PM forum could include representatives from each of the functional directorates who are critical to the success of the project. For instance, the structure may include representatives from sales and marketing, solution architecture/planning, engineering, operation and maintenance, contracting, legal, and, of course, project management. Includ-

ing each of the functional silos in the process of reviewing and recommending standard tools and methodologies will help to develop a sense of ownership and partnership among the various representatives and, in turn, their associated directorates. In organizations where project management is not fully accepted, this type of synergy may also help expedite acceptance of this management approach.

In some cases, an organization may choose to have only project managers on the PM forum. This is acceptable if your only purpose is to share lessons learned on how to better manage a

out how *they* can achieve the same results. The synergy generated by this internal competition will be a major factor in expediting the development and implementation of consistent tools and methodologies throughout the organization. It will also be a major factor in building the internal political support needed to make project management and the PM forum successful.

Benefits of the PM Forum Concept

Some of the benefits derived from implementing the PM forum concept include the ability to . . .

- ◀ gain acceptance and implement a consistent methodology for managing projects without formally mandating it to the organization;
- ◀ improve communications throughout the organization using a capillary approach, where the various representatives disseminate information about agreed upon

IT'S OFTEN THE SIMPLE THINGS THAT
MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
SUCCESS AND FAILURE.

project from the PM's perspective. However, if your desire is to build a consistent set of tools and methodologies, then it's imperative that the other functional disciplines be included in the process.

When given the opportunity to talk to groups or individuals who are trying to implement project management, I like to tell them, "Success will breed acceptance." In other words, if you show that projects that have used a consistent methodology or tool kit are being delivered successfully—on time, under budget and of the desired quality—then it won't take long for the rest of the organization to stand up and take note. This is particularly true in large, diversified organizations made up of various lines of business (LOB).

When a LOB starts outperforming its peers in the company, the other groups will be interested in finding

methodologies or practices;

- ◀ establish a formal body for reviewing and approving proposed best practices; and
- ◀ provide an arena for sharing knowledge and lessons learned on projects.

It's often the simple things that make the difference between success and failure. This is the case with the PM forum concept, which is relatively simple in theory; however, it has the ability to make a powerful impact on the organization and, in turn, lead to a higher success rate for your projects in the future. So, the next time you feel like you're experiencing déjà vu on a project, try setting up a PM forum. It just might make your life a little easier!

Michael G. Martin, PMP, is with Arthur Andersen's business consulting practice. He is also president of the Georgia PMI Chapter. ◀