Breakfast Roundtable

Project Management for Small Groups or Projects –

Implementing the PMI Methodology Under Limited Resources

March 10, 2011

Challenges:

* Even in situations with a PMO, on smaller projects managed by a non-project manager it is possible to use the project tools but not the full blown set of tools.
* In smaller companies, project managers can use as little as 20% of their time managing projects.
* Larger companies tend to waste money since cost tracking can get lost in the volume of projects.
* It is easier to develop the PMO but harder to justify the benefits.
* For smaller companies it is hard to justify the expense of some tools.
* In smaller companies the people who work there tend to do everything (“chief cook and bottle washer”) so prioritization becomes very important.
* People have limited time to read documentation and meeting minutes.

Valuable Tools and Creative Solutions:

* It is important to know the scope of the project since the key to successful ones is to manage the scope.
* Structure is important and a weekly status update is valuable.
* It is important to keep a record of what was discussed, so meeting minutes are crucial.
* It is best to manage the scope in such a way as to bring benefit to the business and then use Agile to develop. For smaller projects people felt that Agile was the way to go.
* Many of the budgeting tools are too complex for small projects. It was felt that tracking scope and the timeline are more important.
* Document Repository Ideas:
  + Using Lotus Notes with standardized forms, creating a new database for each project.
  + Create an Excel workbook with separate pages for each item: scope, contact list, communication plan, action items log, issues list, key decisions, and risk log, then update the workbook to track the status of the project.
  + Use Sharepoint. When the cost is prohibitive, one could use a hosted version in companies without a license.
  + There are many options now like Google Docs which allow people to share documents online. This is currently being used by the Buffalo Chapter to share access by people across companies.
    - Google Docs has detailed change tracking; it even tracks changes by cells in Excel for example.
    - Google Docs doesn’t have all the features of other things, such as Sharepoint, but has many features.
    - Another benefit is that there is only one version.
  + Manymoon from LinkedIn is another source for sharing documents.
  + When sharing documentation and templates put them on the LAN, and then include links in emails to make it easy for people to review or include the actual document in the email. Another possibility is to create a snapshot of what you really want them to read and paste that into the email.
* Create bullet points in meeting minutes and then transfer these to action items.
* Get someone else to take the notes when you are running the meeting.
* Try to get the minutes out within one or two days while the information is still fresh.
* The importance of meetings for a project team was stressed with more frequent ones as the project nears the end. These meetings can be used to keep the team focused.
* Hold the team “hostage” by scheduling a meeting just before lunch and providing lunch after the meeting.
* Standing up for short meetings makes them faster and gets the oxygen flowing.
* In smaller companies where the people working there tend to “do everything” it is important to use Pareto’s Law (80/20 Rule).
* Not only is prioritization very important in small projects, it is important to not change the priorities often. This will facilitate getting something done and out. Later one can expand on it, but in the meantime you are providing something tangible (a kind of Agile).
* It is important to find the time and/or money to show some appreciation to the team.
  + Buy a “traveling trophy” which gets passed around and displayed by the current winner. This is a great way to provide recognition within the entire team or organization.
  + Have a pizza party.
  + Just call the team member, send out a memo or give a gift card to congratulate on a job well done.
* Remote people – we had a variety of (and sometimes conflicting) opinions on the best ways to handle this.
  + Call rather than email.
  + Email provides a record, so perhaps do both.
  + Video conferencing is a good way to communicate.

Benefits of Smaller Projects/Companies:

* There tends to be less waste on small projects because companies because can’t hide the waste. This also tends to be true for small companies.

Items of Limited Value:

* It is hard to use cost analysis techniques because the projects tend to be short, therefore it is hard to analyze trends.
* MS Project tends to be too complicated for small projects. Perhaps use Excel because this also has the benefit that most people have Excel. Other thoughts on MS Project:
  + Never put in the dates, put in tasks and assign to people and let it assign the dates.
  + Get estimates from actual workers and create the project plan from that to get realistic dates.

Book Suggestions:

* The One-Page Project Manager by Clark A. Campbell
* Dynamic Scheduling With Microsoft Office Project by Eric Uyttewaal