

**TITLE: "WHY DOES PROJECT MANAGEMENT FAIL?"**

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*"It must be remembered that project management is first and foremost a philosophy of management, not an elaborate set of tools and techniques.*

*It will only be as effective as the people who use it."*

- Bryce's Law

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper is a continuation of my recent articles on Project Management. In addition to problems related to the activities of Project Management (e.g., planning, estimating, scheduling, reporting, and control), I often run into companies who ask the simple question, "Why can't we get our act together? Why does Project Management routinely fail in our company?"

I do not believe a company's overall problems in Project Management can be attributed to a specific tool or technique (although some certainly do not help matters). Instead, I believe it is based on how important a company considers Project Management to be. If they believe it to be a vital part of the company's overall performance, it will be more successful than a company who considers it irrelevant. In other words, I view Project Management as integral part of the corporate culture.

Let's consider the indicators of how a company values Project Management:

\* **LACK OF KNOWLEDGE** - employees simply lack the basic knowledge of the mechanics of Project Management. I do not run into too many companies anymore with a total absence of knowledge in this regard. The conceptual foundation of Project Management has been around for a number of years. There is a multitude of training programs in Project Management, both at the college and commercial level. There are also several discussion groups on the Internet and professional associations dealing with this subject (e.g., the Project Management Institute of Newtown Square, PA).  
<http://www.pmi.org/>

Hiring or contracting people with absolutely no knowledge of basic Project Management concepts is becoming a rarity.

\* **LACK OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY** - the company has not adopted a formal policy for managing projects. Consequently, informal and inconsistent approaches to project management are used with mixed results. This is a much more common occurrence than finding a company devoid of knowledge in Project Management.

\* **LACK OF ENFORCEMENT OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES** - even though a policy has been established, it is not enforced. As a result, inconsistent results emerge. If a standard and consistent approach to Project Management is devised by a company, it must be routinely policed in order to assure accuracy and uniform results. It is one thing to enact legislation, quite another to enforce it.

\* **LACK OF CONSIDERATION FOR THE MAGNITUDE AND COMPLEXITIES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ATTACK IT IN PIECE MEAL** - People seem to naturally underestimate the magnitude of project management. For example, project planning involves defining work breakdown structures and dependencies which is a precursor to estimating, planning, reporting and control; estimating is a prerequisite to scheduling; time reporting impacts project estimates and schedules; resource allocation is based on availability of qualified people (skills inventory) and current project schedules; etc. There is an overwhelming number of software packages on the market attacking various aspects of Project Management, but very few addressing it is an integrated whole.

It must be remembered that project management is first and foremost a philosophy of management, not an elaborate set of tools and techniques, nor is it an administrative function. Rather, it is concerned with managing human beings towards the accomplishment of work (it is a "people management" function). As such, project management will only be as effective as the people who use it.

Ultimately, project management represents DISCIPLINE, ORGANIZATION, and ACCOUNTABILITY; which are three areas people seem to have a natural aversion to these days.

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**DISCIPLINE** - In the western world, people tend to resist discipline because some believe it inhibits creativity and personal freedom. As a result, teamwork is often sacrificed in favor of rugged individualism.

**ORGANIZATION** - Pursuant to discipline is the problem of organization. Again, in the western world, people prefer to maintain their own identity and organize themselves to meet their needs as opposed to the needs of the organization. There are also those who claim, "*A cluttered desk is the sign of a brilliant mind.*" Hogwash. In contrast, I am a believer of the Navy's regimen whereby you either work on something, file it, or throw it away. This forces people to get organized. If we need more files, let's get them. A cluttered desk is a sign of a disorganized person. Shape up, or ship out.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** - This is an area people tend to rebel against the most. The approach to project management, as advocated by "PRIDE," ultimately represents visibility and responsibility to produce according to plan. Unfortunately, some people shun commitments and, instead, prefer to hide their activity, thereby they cannot be measured and evaluated. This is typically the reaction of people who are insecure. People who are confident in their abilities have no problem with the accountability issue.

### REACTIVE VS. ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

The old adage, "*If you do not make the decision, the decision will be made for you,*" is valid. This also sums up the difference between an active and a reactive manager. True Project Management requires an "active" manager, not "reactive." The active manager takes care of the problems before they happen. They plan on the future. The reactive manager deals with yesterday and waits until problems occur, then tries to take care of them. Today, more and more IT organizations find themselves in a constant "firefighting" mode of operation. Why? Because of a "reactive" management style. The "reactive" manager never seems to get ahead, yet probably enjoys the highest visibility in the company. As an aside, beware of your "firefighters," they are probably your chief arsonists.

Managers don't wait for things to happen, they make things happen.

### HOW MUCH PROJECT MANAGEMENT IS NECESSARY?

Can the philosophies of project management be adopted and implemented by a single group of people for a single project? Yes. A department or division? Certainly. The entire company? Definitely. In fact, as the scope grows, communications improves and the philosophy is more consistently applied.

The scope of project management affects many people:

- \* The individual worker will prepare estimates and schedules, perform project work, and report on activities.
- \* The project manager will plan and direct the use of resources on projects, and solve problems.
- \* Department managers will administer resources and control projects within an area.
- \* Executive management will establish project priorities and monitor project progress.

Obviously, project management should not be restricted to a handful of people or projects. Dozens of projects may be active at any one time, involving hundreds of workers across departmental boundaries. Synchronization of the work effort is required to maximize effect and minimize confusion. Project management, therefore, should be viewed as a corporate philosophy as opposed to a technique used by a select few. Only when a standard and consistent approach to Project Management is adopted by a company will it become an integral part of the corporate culture. We will then hear less about why Project Management fails, and more of how the company is prospering.

For additional information on "PRIDE" Project Management, see:  
<http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/pride/pm.htm>

**END**

"PRIDE" Special Subject Bulletins can be found at the "PRIDE Methodologies for IRM Discussion Group" at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mbapride/>

You are welcome to join this group if you are so inclined.

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