TITLE: "THE MINI-PROJECT MANAGER CONCEPT"

by Tim Bryce
Managing Director
M. Bryce & Associates (MBA)
P.O. Box 1637
Palm Harbor, FL 34682-1637
United States
Tel: 727/786-4567
E-Mail: timb001@phmainstreet.com
Yahoo! IM: littleleaguerng
WWW: http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/
Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

"Manage from the bottom up; not just from the top down; this creates personal commitment and accountability."
- Bryce's Law

INTRODUCTION

A couple of months ago we started a free service to analyze a person's style of management. Through our *"Bryce Management Analysis,"* a manager answers a series of questions (30 in all) and, based on his responses, we produce a report which assesses his style of management as well as other attributes. For details, see:

http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/bma.htm

The data collected from these surveys has confirmed a lot of my suspicions; that companies are regressing back to a Theory X form of management. Over the last twenty years we have witnessed a dramatic swing from a Theory Y or Z form of management, back to Theory X. Whereas workers used to be empowered to make decisions and tackle assignments (a la Theory Y or Z), managers today tend to micromanage every action or decision in their department. Workers are told what to do, how to do it, and when it has to be done, with little regard for their input. We see this not only in the corporate world, but in nonprofit organizations as well. The result is that organizations today are run by control freaks who would be more content working with robots as opposed to human beings. This mentality has resulted in an apathetic workforce that doesn't trust management. It also breeds contempt and disloyalty for management, as well as making for some excellent fodder for such things as Dilbert and NBC's hit comedy, *"The Office."*

Although there are instances where a Theory X form of management can work effectively, it nonetheless represents a top-down unidirectional "master-slave" relationship. Theory X can work well in certain crisis situations, such as "crunch-time" projects, but it is hardly conducive for a normal mode of operation in today's society. Let me be clear on this, under a Theory X form of management, project planning, estimating, scheduling, reporting and control is performed top-down. Instead, a bi-directional approach is recommended which is a critical aspect of the Mini-Project Manager concept.

THE CONCEPT

The Mini-Project Manager (MPM) concept is based on our experiences in several I.T. shops over a number of years and was first described in the Project Management activities of our "PRIDE" methodologies dating back to 1971. Unlike Theory X, the MPM concept seeks to empower workers and make them more responsible for their actions. It promotes more management and less supervision. Actually, under the MPM concept, the individual is expected to act professionally and supervise themselves.

There are still some top-down activities to be performed by management, such as project planning where projects are defined and prioritized. Further, managers select and allocate human resources to participate in project assignments. It also includes establishing project Work Breakdown Structures (WBS; e.g., phases, activities, tasks) and precedent relationships between such structures. Here, the manager relies on such things as Skills Inventories, Resource Allocations, Calendars, and Priority Modeling tools.

After projects are assigned, workers estimate the amount of effort needed to perform the work. This is a critical aspect of the MPM concept and is typically not found in today's Theory X environments. Here, the worker is asked, *"What do you think?"* But understand this, the worker's estimate is an expression of his personal commitment to the work involved. If the manager does not agree with the estimate, he may ask the worker to rationalize his estimate. If the manager is unhappy with the answer, he may elect to give the assignment to someone else (perhaps another employee or a contractor). Nonetheless, the estimate is an expression of commitment by the person.

Based on the estimate, the manager then calculates the project schedule. Whereas the worker developed the estimate, the manager computes the schedule. Here, the manager considers the project's WBS and precedent relationships. More importantly, the manager considers the Indirect and Unavailable time affecting the worker. This means the MPM concept does not subscribe to the

(continued from page 1)

"Man Hour" approach to project estimating and scheduling. I have discussed the differences in the use of time in many other articles, but in a nutshell we view time as:

AVAILABLE TIME - this is the time workers are available to perform work; e.g., Monday through Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm.

UNAVAILABLE TIME - this is the time when workers are not available for work; e.g., weekends, holidays, vacations, and planned absences.

Available Time is subdivided into two categories:

DIRECT TIME - representing the time when workers are performing their project assignments and, as such, estimates are expressed in Direct Time.

INDIRECT TIME - interferences which keep workers from performing their project assignments. For example, meetings, training classes, reviewing publications, telephone calls and e-mail, surfing the Internet, and breaks.

The relationship between Direct and Indirect Time is referred to as "Effectiveness Rate" which is an analysis of a worker's availability to perform project work. For example, the average office worker is typically 70% effective, meaning in an eight hour day a worker spends approximately five hours on direct assignments and three on indirects. **Effectiveness Rate is by no means a mea-**

surement of efficiency. For example, a highly skilled veteran worker may have a lower effectiveness rate than a novice worker with less skills who has a higher effectiveness rate; yet, the veteran worker can probably complete an assignment faster than the novice. It just means the novice can manage his time better than the veteran worker. Again, what we are seeing is the individual worker being personally responsible for supervising his own time. Interestingly, a manager typically has a low effectiveness rate as he typically has a lot of indirect activities occupying his time. For example, it is not unusual to find managers with a 20-30% effectiveness rate.

Returning to scheduling, the manager uses the worker's effectiveness rate when calculating project schedules. If the worker's estimate is such that it greatly impacts the schedule, the manager may consider alternatives, such as influencing the worker's indirect time (eliminating interferences) and unavailable time (work overtime or on weekends, possibly cancel vacations, etc.).

This brings up another important aspect of the MPM concept, the manager is responsible for controlling the work environment. In addition to the physical aspects of the job such as the venue and tools to be made available to the worker, it also includes managing Indirect Time. For example, if a worker is working on a project assignment on the critical path, the manager may elect to excuse the worker from meetings and training so that he can concentrate on the project assignment. Whereas the individual worker is concerned with managing his Direct Time,

THE MINI-PROJECT MANAGER CONCEPT

WORKER
(bottom-up)
Estimate
Perform work
Supervise self
Report

MANAGER
(top-down)
Plan & schedule
Control work environment
Review progress

MANAGING FROM THE BOTTOM-UP

(continued from page 2)

the manager controls the Indirect Time. It is important to understand that nobody can be 100% effective; for nothing else, we as human beings need breaks so that we can refocus our attention on our work.

The "Effectiveness Rate" technique serves two purposes: it builds reality into a project schedule, and; it provides a convenient mechanism for a manager to control the work environment. For example, a manager may decide to send someone to a training class to develop their skills (representing Indirect Time). By doing so, he is weighing the impact of this decision against the worker's current assignments.

As workers perform their project tasks, they report their use of time (representing another "bottom-up" characteristic of the MPM concept). In addition to reporting time against assignment, workers are asked to appraise the amount of time remaining on a Direct assignment (not Indirects). This is referred to as "Estimate to Do" which is substantially different than the "Percent Complete" technique whereby workers are asked where they stand on an assignment. The problem here is that workers become "90% complete" yet never seem to be able to complete the last 10%. Under the "Estimate to Do" approach, the worker estimates the amount of time to complete a task. To illustrate how this works, let's assume a worker estimates 30 hours to perform a task. During the week, he works 15 hours on the task. He is then asked how much time remains on it. Maybe its simply 15 hours (whereby the worker was correct on his estimate) or perhaps he determines the task is more difficult than he anticipated and 25 hours remain (15 hours performed + 25 hours "to do" = 50); conversely, perhaps he found that the task was easier than imagined and only 5 hours remain (15 hours performed + 5 hours "to do" = 20). Either way, this will affect project schedules and the manager must then consider the repercussions and take the necessary actions. "Estimate to Do" is another example of where the individual worker is asked, *"What do you think?"*

Although the reporting of time can be performed in any time cycle, we recommend a weekly posting. This can be performed either with Project Management software or using a manual system involving Time Distribution Worksheets. Either way, it is important for the manager to review each worker's distribution of time (including Direct, Indirect, and Unavailable time) and their effectiveness rate for the week. This review should not be considered frivolous as the manager should carefully scrutinize the worker's Direct and Indirect time as they might impact project schedules.

A good Project Management system should have the ability to "roll-up" time reports into departmental summaries for analysis by the manager. For example, a departmental effectiveness rate can be calculated thereby providing the manager with a means to study which workers are working above or below the departmental average. Again, you are cautioned that this is not an efficiency rating and workers should not necessarily be competing over who has the highest effectiveness rate. Accurate time reporting is required to make this work properly.

Both the individual and departmental effectiveness rates should be plotted on line graphs to allow the manager to study trends, as well as determining averages over a period of time; e.g., three months (quarterly) or annually.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the MPM concept requires a good Project Management system (either automated or manual) and a good attitude by all of the participants involved, both managers and workers alike. Some people resist the concept as it forces accountability. Now, instead of the manager making an estimate, the worker is charged with this task, something that doesn't sit well with some people who shirk responsibility. Further, some Theory X managers falsely see it as a threat to their control and authority. However, most people welcome the MPM concept as it represents more freedom and empowerment. This helps promote project ownership by the workers as they now feel their input is heard by management, which leads to improved corporate loyalty, trust, harmony, and teamwork.

By encouraging worker participation in Project Management, they tend to act more professionally and responsibly in project activities. Interestingly, as workers are given more freedom, they are forced to become more disciplined and accountable at the same time.

CONCLUSION

It was back in 1982 when Dr. William Ouchi wrote his popular book, *"Theory Z,"* describing Japanese management practices empowering workers. And it was in 1986 when President Ronald Reagan advised, *"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere."* Keep in mind, this was twenty years ago. A lot has happened in the last twenty years; the Baby Boomers have been succeeded by Generation X, who is also being succeeded by Generations Y and Z. In the process, socioeconomic conditions have changed as

well as the management landscape. Frankly, I think a lot of the management practices of today are dehumanizing. There is little concern for the people side of management, only numbers and technology. Its no small wonder that workers are becoming more socially dysfunctional.

To change this, I recommend that managers manage more and supervise less. And this is the heart of the Mini-Project Manager concept.

For a sample Time Distribution Worksheet, see:
http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/pride/iw019.jpg

END

About the Author

Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for training and consulting on an international basis.

"PRIDE" Special Subject Bulletins can be found at:

http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mbass.htm

They are also available through 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.

The "Management Visions" Internet audio broadcast is available at:

http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/mv.htm

Also, be sure to read Tim's Blog at:

http://blogs.ittoolbox.com/pm/irm/

"PRIDE" is the registered trademark of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) and can be found on the Internet at:

http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/pride/

Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*