

Project Management Success

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In 1992, in *Liberation Management*, Tom Peters argued that all organizations are becoming “projectized”, and all employees are becoming “project managers”. Today, many of us can confirm that project management is a daily part of business.

Why? Because, as organizations flatten, re-engineer, speed-up or downsize, and inhabit a fast changing world, most of us end up managing projects — one-time tasks with a clear beginning and end, and time and budget constraints. No longer limited to “project managers” from Engineering or Product Development, sales and HR representatives, administrative assistants, managers and supervisors, to name some, have their share of projects.

The need is not slackening. Projects are fast, economic responses to competitive challenges.

What is project management? It is managing people and resources to complete a unique event by getting work done through, and with, other people and *processes*.

Project management tools are simple, and easy to learn. They include Force-Field Analysis, Affinity and Tree Diagrams, Work Breakdown Structures (project talk for task lists), Process-Flow Charts, and, of course, Brainstorming. Fundamental management processes include planning, influencing, managing stakeholders, communicating and negotiating.

Project management tools **are** simple, so why do so many projects fail? They go over budget, and/or do not meet schedule, and get results that fail to come up to expectations!

In research on hundreds of projects of all types, Jeffrey Pinto and Dennis Slevin identified 10 project management processes accounting for project success or failure.

- Establishing clear direction — purpose, mission, goals, and objectives
- Gaining top management support
- Planning and scheduling
- Staying close to clients

- Staffing
- Finding and applying relevant skills
- Transferring projects to end users
- Monitoring and feedback
- Communicating
- Problem Solving

Their findings are important. Typically, at least eighty percent of a project’s results come from the processes followed and only twenty percent from the people following them. So, following the right processes (“doing it by the numbers”) is critical.

That is the rub! “Doing it by the numbers” takes time and attention.

Instead, everyday pressures lead us to exclaim...“there is never enough *time* to do it right”. *Which means*, we have to find the time to do it over AND, doing it over costs 3 times to 1000 times as much as doing it right the first time (something many people now understand because of “TQM” or 6-Sigma efforts).

We often ignore this REALITY when faced with a project and a short deadline.

Facing incredible pressures to do more with less, and faster, people feel even more justified skimming by — “*who has the resources to do it right!?*” Yet, who can afford the accompanying waste?

Project Quick Tips

Eliminate “re-work” at every stage. One way is to involve everyone in the project early and intensively. This gives upstream and downstream participants early warning of issues, interface needs and goals - reducing rework.

Live with and benefit from the “fuzzy front end”. Do not lock-in scope, goals or plans until you have downstream input, but then...

Develop a clear “project scope” – performance, cost, and schedules. It will guide tradeoffs and priority conflicts as they arise. Finally...

Manage! Sound management processes lead to sound outcomes. If you dictate, ramrod, refuse to delegate, have weak goals, plan and communicate poorly, the results are predictable: poor motivation, commitment, and results.

This creates a serious dilemma. In competitive situations, you cannot afford to be slow if competitors are fast. But, if you do not take time to do things right, costs can explode out of control. To survive, or thrive, you have to re-design your processes to plan *better*, reducing errors and expensive re-work, and you have to do it *faster*.

How do you span the horns of this dilemma? How do you do projects BOTH *better* AND *faster*? Here are some tips that support many of the processes identified by Pinto and Slevin:

“Bring downstream upstream”

Involve everyone impacted by, or affecting the project, early and intensively. This gives everyone (upstream and downstream) early warning of issues, interface requirements and objectives — reducing re-work later. Including “suppliers” and “customers” helps clarify purpose, mission and goals, again reducing errors and waste.

Bringing downstream upstream has a *major impact* on project success and directly affects planning and scheduling, problem solving, communicating, staying close to clients, and establishing clear direction.

Use “scope” for decision-making

A clearly defined project scope (performance, budget, schedule) gives clear direction. It becomes the standard or target that permits management — no target, no management, just activity.

A defined scope forces you to consider tradeoffs between its elements. A change in “schedule” affects either “budget” or, “technical performance”. A scope statement focuses sound analysis and points to the information needed to gain management support or to negotiate adjustments.

To use this tool fully in complex projects, revenue or cost impact projections are added to the three scope elements. Simple economic models create clear standards for decision-making. For example, “a one month delay in schedule reduces net revenues from the project by \$300,000. If \$30,000 of overtime pay can overcome the delay, what should you do?”

“Overlap and overstaff”

Put all the necessary resources onto the project. Two aspects of staffing have a huge impact.

First, instead of spreading all your resources between multiple projects, consider putting *all* the necessary resources into the key projects. For example, instead of doing projects “a”, “b”, and “c” simultaneously, do “a” first, then “b”, then “c”.

Under *many* circumstances, increased productivity resulting from establishing effective relationships, teamwork, communication, and reduced wait times, allow *all* the projects to be completed earlier. If they involve revenue generation, or cost reduction, you can capture revenues and profits earlier (or that you would never otherwise get).

Compare the revenue impact of completing all three projects at the same time to accelerating the first, which then begins generating revenue, then the second, which begins generating revenues, then the third, all within the same time.

Two projects, “a” and “b”, will produce revenues earlier which otherwise would have never been captured. Not only that, but the learning curve impact might actually speed up subsequent projects, generating revenues even earlier.

Second, “loading” individuals at high levels on *multiple projects* and non-project tasks, for example committing 95% of their available time, reduces productivity as they jump between, and constantly re-start, projects. Partially done tasks and delays ripple throughout the project, affecting everyone and their schedules (and costs). A useful guideline is “to do more, do less”. Commit individuals to fewer projects and reduce overall loads.

Sound project management is important for business, and personal, success. Learn the most effective and efficient methods for project planning and management. There is too much at stake for your customers and your business, to fail to learn how to do projects “by the numbers”.

Doug Pearson’s background encompasses twenty-eight years in management, higher education, training, and organization development.

Pearson Consulting Associates offers a range of organization and employee development support. Training offerings include *Project Management: Tools and Tactics*, the *Positive Power & Influence Program®*, the *Positive Negotiation Program®*, *21st Century Leadership™*, and *The Game of Income Outcome™*. PCA also provides sophisticated performance development tools and a range of individual, managerial, and team assessments.

Project management clients include Sony, Amgen, BP, Kyocera Wireless, Southern Gas Association, Hybritech, Parker-Hannifin, Mead, Georgia-Pacific, El Paso Energy and many others.