
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

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Mastering Projects In The 21st Century

Project management is a process which best guides a project to its completion using the people, budget, and resources to their maximum benefit. Managing projects dates back at least 4,500 years, yet the role of project manager is only recently becoming recognized as a discipline in its own right. Project management is so different of any another type of management because many projects are attempted without any past history. The project may have a clear cut beginning and ending, but everything in the middle is not clearly defined at the start of the project. With multi-tasking being part of our everyday lives, we often have other duties that monopolize our time so we are not able to focus solely on one project. Knowing how to make a project run in the smoothest manner possible will decrease the amount of time the project takes, as well as decreasing the stress and pressure of completion. There are six main phases of project management that we will overview below.

Phase 1: Determine Project Specifics

During the first phase of your project, you want to examine the benefits of gathering all your information up front. Completing this will allow you to clarify the expertise and skills needed. Analyzing the skills of your project team will help you determine who will be best used in which area. With your team, brainstorm ways to complete the project on budget and on schedule. You may even be able to detect problems and concerns in their early stages.

Phase 2: Chart Out a Successive Project Plan

Your first team meeting will probably be spent on developing detailed tasks for each member, creating

a budget, breaking the project down into the major and minor milestones, and setting your timeline. Doing all of this is going to take lots of cooperation from everyone involved. This is the phase that will either unite everyone as a team or single out a few individuals who want to be in "control". In order to have a powerful team, unity must be reached. The old saying "There is no I in team" still holds true today. Everyone must have an active role in order for you to be successful. Creating a code of conduct will help to achieve this. A code of conduct is a tool created by the project team to give direction on how people will be treated and expectations on performance while working on the project. Developing this up front will eliminate any confusion as to what is expected.

Phase 3: Implement and Execute the Plan

Communication is the key to every successful project. Knowing how and what to communicate to whom is vital in keeping the project on the right track. Always remember that there inevitably will be changes in your project. Make sure it is stated very clearly up front who has the authority to handle any changes that need to be made. Once a change has taken place, communicate it to everyone involved--including upper management and the customer.

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When your organization operates like a strong family, you can't be knocked out by one punch.

*Mike Kryzewski
Duke Basketball Coach*

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Phase 4: Monitor Milestones and Critical Path

Once you have set the milestones for the project, do not forget to monitor them. Watch for signs of a problem, such as the budget being spent faster than planned or internal conflict. Catching problems as soon as possible will make it easier to get back on track. Getting back on schedule may require some overtime of team members, starting future tasks or phases early, or maybe even hiring an outside contractor to help make up for lost time. If you are unable to get back up to speed, you may have to renegotiate the deadline with your customer. Renegotiation must be done tactfully. Do not go into the meeting demanding a later ending date. You have to be flexible and realize that your customer is on a time schedule also. Do your research and homework beforehand. Know exactly how much extra time you are going to need. Communicate the new deadlines as early as possible. This will help your customer plan for the changes as well. Above all, be prepared to be responsible for the new dates. You do not want to have to change the deadline for a second time!

Phase 5: Close Out

Finishing a project is always an exciting, and sometimes stressful, time. Before you start celebrating, however, make sure that all of the project objectives and criteria have been met. To ensure customer satisfaction, create a series of signoffs. Close out all your books, bills, and charges. Also, gain a consensus for how the project will be handed off to the customer. If customer training is needed, schedule that now.

Phase 6: Post Mortem and Celebration

A post mortem is a meeting that focuses on examining the project and analyzing the good, the bad, and what lessons have been learned. Post mortems are important because they build data and

information that will help other projects and teams have a better chance of success. They also create strategies for speeding up future projects. After the post mortem has been completed, it's time to celebrate! Brainstorm with your team what a good celebration will be. Some examples are: team pictures, supper or dinner, comp time, or cake and recognition. You do not have to wait until the project is completed to celebrate. You can have mini celebrations for any milestone or task completion. Having something to look forward to is a great motivation to keep on working, even when you want to quit.

Good project management skills will be developed over time with the more projects in which you are involved. Getting a good start on those skills will help you become an even better project manager (or team member) from the very beginning.



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