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Letters to the Editor

On the Subject of the Separation of Project Management vs. Project Financing in reference to Max Wideman's September Letter to the Editor

11 September , 2007

Dear Editor

I read with interest R. Max Wideman's comments on what he considers the desirable project management competency of "Keeps the project funded". At first, such a competency appears attractive and beneficial, but on deeper analysis there is something disturbing about a system which considers such a competency desirable, and it is this: it violates what should be the clear separation between governance accountabilities and management accountabilities.

The results from a research project I am currently undertaking which is focused on measuring the impacts of governance practices on project outcomes, show that for many people involved in projects (in various roles) that the distinction between governance roles and responsibilities, (as carried out by Sponsors, Owners, Steering Committee and Board members), and management roles and responsibilities, (as carried out by Program Managers, Project Managers, Directors, leaders etc), is not only blurred, but is so pervaded by ignorance as to be the single biggest factor impacting on project outcomes and, in the majority of cases, in projects under-performing – even failing. It is very well to describe management roles and target competencies, but where is the same regime for those taking on a governance role? Project managers have the PMP, but where is the professional certification for project sponsors?

So, where the project manager is required (forced?) to take on the role of sourcing funds for the project, we have a situation where the manager is taking on what is clearly a governance duty. Furthermore, by doing so, the project manager loses some of the professional independence the role affords, and by such actions, takes on accountability for business case realisation. The project manager's decision making could easily become compromised and their ability to provide independent advice brought into question. Of course the question being begged is: "What is the sponsor doing – or not doing – that necessitates the project manager to source project funding?" Indeed, once could argue that if such a situation occurs we have our dead canary in the coal mine: it is indeed a harbinger for dangerous times ahead (the headline reads: "Project dead on arrival. Sponsor nowhere to be seen. PM left holding the baby").

Mr. Wideman is to be congratulated for elevating this very important issue. As an industry, we have 'done management to death', surely it is now the time to turn our focus to governance.

*Regards,
Michael Knapp
Sydney, Australia
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On the Subject of Project Response to Catastrophic Disaster

6 September, 2007

Dear Editor:

With reference to your editorial: **Project Management for Emergency Response & Disaster Recovery - A Call to Arms** *in the September edition of PM World Today:*

Natural disasters give little advance notice of timing and no notice as to the extent of life and property loss. Public safety officials responding to such disasters are well trained in reactive measures, but often have little advance planning time. Plans developed in a hurry cannot be much more than reactive. Initial efforts will most often focus on health issues and minimizing further damage to the infrastructure.

Agencies such as The American Red Cross and The Salvation Army play major roles in bringing life-support activities to the disaster areas in the United States. There are a few faith-based organizations that also provide, in cooperation with The American Red Cross, life-support services. These services are relatively short-term and can do little to restore the infrastructure.

Recently, Jim Burton, Senior Director of the North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Georgia, wrote a chapter entitled "A Faith-based Response to Catastrophic Disaster: An Overview of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Planning and Logistics in Hurricane Katrina." This chapter in Project Manager's Handbook: Applying Best Practices Across Global Industries (McGraw-Hill, September 2007) provides a starting point for investigating how project management may be used to recover from natural disasters.

Best regards,
Lew Ireland
Georgia, USA

On the Subject of the August Article on Project Complexity Model

7 September, 2007

Dear Editor,

I tend to agree with Bill on this.

To take it one step further, Aaron Shenhar, Stevens Institute and Dov Dvir, Ben Gurion University, have recently published the results of their research, entitled "Reinventing Project Management- The Diamond Approach to Successful Growth and Innovation, which features a complexity radar graph measured around the Complexity, Technology, Novelty and Pace, which I found to be extremely interesting and exciting.

Professionally, I suspect there are more attributes than just those 4, (as Bill notes, management complexity) but I think Shenhar and Dvir's model is a major step in the right direction.

Best Regards,
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