Overcoming Organizational Dysfunction Using Project Management to Get Work Done

Data shows that Project Management has a positive impact on organizations. So why isn’t it working the way you intended in your organization? It could be that your organizational culture is getting in the way. The overall effectiveness may be directly impacted by the organizational culture and your ability to adapt your project management approach to that culture. By adapting your approach based on what is important, you can help the organization adopt sound strategies that can directly impact results.

Value of Project Management Processes

Well-executed project management that fits within the culture of the organization creates repeatable processes that can lead to sustainable innovation through ever-improving efficiency. It improves communication between business units, improves the quality of the product, improves perceived value, manages risks and reduces cost. As a leader, it is much easier to report to stakeholders the good news that results from project management than the bad news that emerges without it. For details, refer to the Understanding the Value of Project Management white paper at http://forwardmomentum.net/white-papers/.
Culture and the Top Five Project Management Hurdles

Where does culture get in the way? Here is our version of the top five hurdles found within organizations.

1. Firefighting and Drama
2. Turf Protection
3. Miracle Workers
4. Unrealistic Expectations
5. Micro-Management

1. Firefighting and Drama

This type of culture focuses on immediate concern over long-term value and success. Characteristics include:

- The organization values frenzied activity and “save the day” heroics
  - Can become the de facto approach
- Work that is completed calmly or without drama is seen as “the easy project” rather than a job well done by the project manager
- Planning and planners are not rewarded and are seen as average
- Workers don’t “have time to plan” because they are too busy putting out fires

2. Turf Protection

This type of culture values department structures over cooperation. Characteristics include:

- A “trust no one” mentality
- Functional areas / teams don’t talk to each other
- Intentional lack of communication between departments or groups
- Minimal sharing
- “Outsiders” are cut out or not given all needed information

This type of activity primarily applies to work groups or departments, but can apply to individuals, too.
3. Miracle Workers

This type of culture expects results without being involved in the process. Characteristics include:

- Lack of senior management or client support
  - They want convenience, not accountability
  - They are not willing to participate in planning or problem solving
  - They do not provide answers or directions in a timely manner
- Project Management is not valued
  - Don’t see value in the process
  - It is seen as too costly
  - It is seen as too slow
  - It is not understood

4. Unrealistic Expectations

This type of culture sets deadlines and deliverables that cannot be met. Characteristics include:

- Underestimating the time needed to complete task or the overall project
- Management belief that the team estimates are too conservative
- Losing sight of the details needed to organize and complete tasks
- Underestimating the time to work out disagreements and not planning for issues or risks
- Seeing the PM and SME as slow and therefore distrusting their estimates
- Pulling resources away to do other work

5. Micro-Management

This type of culture restricts activity instead of unlocking creativity. Characteristics include an environment where senior management or clients:

- Go directly to team members without supervisor’s knowledge
- Pull project manager and team in multiple directions
- Question project management processes

For more information on the Top 5 hurdles and how to overcome them, go to [http://forwardmomentum.net/resources/ebooks/](http://forwardmomentum.net/resources/ebooks/)
Overcoming the Barriers Within the Culture

There are steps that can be taken throughout the project to overcome each of these barriers.

Overcoming the Hurdles: Firefighting and Drama

Go along with the culture and use it to your advantage by taking these steps:

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<tr>
<td>• Build constraints and time limits into the plan</td>
<td>• Keep the pressure on to keep everyone delivering</td>
<td>• Highlight necessary changes</td>
<td>• Document accomplishments</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Highlight risks, using them to your advantage</td>
<td>• Recognize accomplishments</td>
<td>• Showcase your flexibility and its necessity</td>
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<td>• Add budget and schedule contingencies for risks</td>
<td>• Fix negative variances as last-minute issues</td>
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<td>• Create an agile-like environment</td>
<td>• Complete each sprint, keeping deadlines in the near term and demonstrating flexibility</td>
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<td>• Manage portfolio so only the right projects are in place</td>
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Overcoming the Hurdles: Turf Protection

In this “trust no one” environment, it’s important to understand the why behind the silos. Is it simply a lack of communication or a true lack of trust? Is it so ingrained in the culture that we do this simply because it is familiar? Building trust is key.

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<td>• Identify why the resistance and adjust actions</td>
<td>• Know the environment – can you go above or around non-participants</td>
<td>• Involve everyone (as much as possible) in changes, decisions</td>
<td>• Document success</td>
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<td>• Decide the appropriate level of involvement</td>
<td>• Step up stakeholder management efforts</td>
<td>• Reach out often and close the feedback loop</td>
<td>• Reward positive involvement throughout</td>
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<td>• Create safe environment</td>
<td>• Keep it a safe environment</td>
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<td>• Be clear on approval procedures, roles and responsibilities, escalation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Build relationships and demonstrate integrity</td>
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Overcoming the Hurdles: Miracle Worker

When the culture is interested in results without active involvement by leadership, it is important to communicate the project risks and the impact of their involvement, or lack thereof.

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<td>• Document needed support, answers, direction, etc.</td>
<td>• Communicate progress to let them know their support is not wasted and to demonstrate complexity of project</td>
<td>• Highlight &amp; document changes that could impact project success from their perspective</td>
<td>• Document lessons learned</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explain WIIFM if they provide this to you</td>
<td>• Highlight any risks, issues occurring, actions needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Highlight risks, especially the impact of their non-involvement</td>
<td>• Keep communicating with them</td>
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Overcoming the Hurdles: Unrealistic Expectations

In this culture, it is important to set detailed and realistic expectations early and communicate them.

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<td>• Identify quick hits and wins to overcome doubts of ability to deliver</td>
<td>• Show progress</td>
<td>• Watch variances carefully; react appropriately</td>
<td>• Document lessons learned</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Document and communicate work to be done, showing complexity</td>
<td>• Communicate - make everyone aware of tasks and progress</td>
<td>• Communicate variances and plans to recover</td>
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<td>• Adopt an agile-like approach to demonstrate successes</td>
<td>• Ensure there are no slow or stall periods</td>
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Overcoming the Hurdles: Micro-Managing

In this environment, clear expectations and communication are priority.

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<tr>
<td>• Build trust early</td>
<td>• Communicate early wins</td>
<td>• Involved stakeholders in change review and analysis</td>
<td>• Make project archives available</td>
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<td>• “Overcommunicate” without burdening the team; communication and escalation procedures</td>
<td>• Anticipate needs so team is not approached directly</td>
<td>• Resolve as much as possible within team</td>
<td>• Acknowledge leadership support</td>
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<td>• Create a frequent enough reporting and meeting strategy</td>
<td>• Recognize “hands off” moments when stakeholders comply</td>
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<td>• Provide right level of details (often means more detail)</td>
<td>• Create environment of “no surprises” philosophy</td>
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<td>• Agree on goals, success criteria, communication and escalation procedures</td>
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For more information on the Top 5 hurdles and how to overcome them, go to http://forwardmomentum.net/resources/ebooks/
Recurring Themes

1. Communication

In all cases communication is key, but there are nuances in how you craft your plan and implement it based on corporate culture. For instance, if you have the micro-manager you go into details and communicate frequently. If you are in a firefighter culture, you can use communication to highlight - less detail and frequency based on accomplishments.

Always communicate:

- Current status/progress
- Expectations
- WIIFM (What’s In It For Me)

2. Plan for Risks

It is important to gather stakeholder input when planning for risks. Problems can occur at any time and in any area of a project. Solicit contributions from all areas for the risk analysis. Keep everyone informed as challenges can surface at any time and solutions may come from unexpected sources.

3. Lessons Learned

At the end of the project always capture a written record for next time of various lessons learned. This is the process of evaluating what went right or wrong during the project. Quantifiable results are more meaningful and easier to communicate.

Lessons learned are recorded and communicated to the organization, not simply archived in a report that is never accessed again.

References:


Appendix

Exercise #1 and 2 – Scenario #1

You are the Project Manager for the following:

Project Overview:

- Due to the recent growth of the organization, you are opening a satellite office for Field Managers. In addition to the Field Managers, a small group of support staff will also be relocating. This support staff includes a Field HR manager, a Communications liaison, and several Administrative Assistants and their Bosses, the Operations Managers.

- This will involve utilizing project resources that must still complete their regular job duties.

- Your directive is to coordinate all components of the move, so that the office is fully functional when the Managers relocate, which includes work stations with access to the network and internet. You’ve been asked to keep Management disruptions to a minimum.

Current Situation:

- You are in week three of the twelve-week project.

- You have created a high level project plan and conducted an initial meeting explaining the general scope of project. Part of this meeting was also used to further define the necessary tasks and activities needed to make this move a success. This included the roles and responsibilities for each project team member. Many of the tasks have critical dependencies. Each team member received an updated copy of the plan that same day. You did not send management the updated detailed plan.

- You notice at the first weekly status meeting that some of the assigned tasks were not completed as outlined in the project plan, and there seems to be confusion around “who is doing what.” When you try to refer team members back to the plan, you are told that plan is no longer accurate because the HR Manager re-assigned some tasks, assigned some additional tasks and changed several due dates. You are unaware of any of these changes and are not documented on your plan or schedule.

- This same Manager seems to question everything, even when knowing that some decisions have already been finalized by Senior Leadership. This is becoming an interruption and wasting time.
Exercise #1 and 2 – Scenario #2

You are the Project Manager for the following:

Project Overview:

- You have just been assigned as the Project Manager for an initiative involving the remodel of 25 separate locations throughout your state. This is a complete redesign of the existing layout and will require extensive coordination between various contractors and the individual locations.

- You have been given the directive that all work must take place outside of the normal business hours for the location. “Normal business hours” do vary by location, but all locations are closed from 6pm Saturday to 9am Monday.

- Senior Management has decided to use the existing three Field Managers as your direct contact for the locations and general project resource. Any activity for a location must be coordinated through the appropriate Field Manager. Each Field Manager is responsible for eight locations.

- One site will be completed first, to test planned strategies and to align the Field Managers. It is expected that ALL Field Managers will be actively involved in converting this location.

- The decision was made to use contractors who already provide services and would not need to be vetted or approved. A general contractor for the project has also been assigned.

Current Situation:

- You recently found out that senior management initially deemed it unnecessary and a waste of resources to have a dedicated project manager for this initiative. Leadership believed existing Field Managers should be able to coordinate this for each of their locations rather easily, especially since they dedicated 50% of their time to the project.

- Two of the Field Managers have yet to attend weekly status meetings. It seems there is always some “emergency” which takes priority. When you mention this to Sr. Management, you are reminded that real operations are first.
Exercise #1 and 2 – Scenario #3

You are the Project Manager for the following:

**Project Overview:**
- Your company is switching providers for the administration of employee benefits. This is a big change for the company, including new software for tracking employees’ time and attendance as well as a new website for self-service benefit management.

- Project requires expertise and resources from several internal departments as well as an external business partners and the new benefit provider.

- This is an IT project with direct impact to HR, Accounting and all company employees. It also directly impacts two external business partners and requires programming and process changes on their end.

**Current Situation:**
- You are currently two weeks behind schedule and although it is very early in the project lifecycle, if this trend continues the implementation date is at risk. According to Senior Management moving the date is not an option.

- You were provided with the resources you requested initially, however in the last two weeks Accounting has pulled their key resources temporarily for another project. When you talked with Sr. Management they felt this resource loss should not impact the project as it is only temporary loss and the project schedule was generous in the first place.

- You hold weekly status meetings with the project team and senior management however for the last two weeks, no one from the Senior Management team has attended.

- You have numerous complaints from the new vendor and the internal IT group about the responsiveness of both the project SMEs and the department heads. They state they are having trouble getting the information they need to complete their development and when they do receive information it is high level and somewhat vague.