

## **Third Time's a Charm; No, They All Are!**

### **Three Short Articles by our favorite Lazy Project Manager, Peter Taylor**

#### **1. Visibility of Purpose**

I was recently on a panel of 'experts' at a project management conference (yes I know, *why was I there...*) and there was a great question from the audience about project quality.

After listening to some of the real experts on the panel I contributed something from my past experience and that was 'visibility of purpose'.

When I regularly ran reviews of projects we, the PMO, were able to identify common issues that challenged our projects and one of these occurred on the larger projects that we were involved in.

To understand then a little about the landscape of the project work we were involved in is required. On a large complex project (or program) there would be many parties involved, ourselves as suppliers, our sub-contractors and third party partners. Then there would be the customer, the customers other suppliers, system integrators, consultants, contractors and many more. So what we always ended up with was a lot of people and therefore a lot of complicated communication as a result.

Now in the early days of the project, the acquisition period, it was typically a small team that worked closely with the customer and, all being well, would secure the business and therefore the project. There was then a kick off with all of the normal items on the agenda and from that point the project team would 'ramp up' i.e. get bigger over a period of time, and new people would join as time progressed.

Now to the point. We discovered that in a number of cases as we assessed the 'health' of the project a lot of the team members no longer (if in fact they had ever in the first place) understood what the project was aiming to deliver, up there, at the top or front end, at the business level.

So think of a coder at an offshore sub-contractor. Do they envisage for example that some small piece of code that they are writing to complete a piece of data transfer for us, and therefore our customer, will contribute to a project that is targeted as reducing waiting lists in hospitals in the public sector? It is just an example but the point is that you would probably move through quite a few layers of the project structure before the project deliverables are directly associated with 'people' and in some way all project deliverables are about 'people'.

So the key is to try and ensure that 'visibility of purpose' is always at the forefront of every team members thought, no matter what their role is, in order to keep the project focused on quality. Make it personal.

## 2. The PMO as Sponsor

I have talked often about the importance of good sponsorship for a project and project manager; I have even started 'The Campaign for Real Project Sponsors' see [www.strategies4sponsors.com](http://www.strategies4sponsors.com) and my LinkedIn group 'Project Sponsors' (all are most welcome). But what can be done when the sponsor(s) in place within an organisation just aren't up to the job.

Is it perhaps possible, in an organization that has weak or limited project sponsor capability, that the PMO could act as the supporter of sponsors on one hand and on the other perhaps the actual sponsor for the smaller project? It is surely better to have this rather than act with no sponsor representation at all. If the project is in direct support of the organization's project practices (e.g., implementing a project management information system) then this will be definitely be a good match and if not then still a good PMO could offer a degree of objectivity and guidance.

The PMO might be a politically acceptable body to provide discrete support for project sponsors should this be required, that is if the PMO is well respected and acknowledged by the project sponsors themselves, as well as the business in general.

As the governance for the project methodology and standards it is natural that this would incorporate sponsorship tasks and deliverables and as such coaching and advice could be easily and sensitively provided upon request.

It would also be the PMOs role to garner and disseminate lessons learned to the project community and, if issues with previous sponsorship capability are raised then this brings the subject under the wing of the PMO anyway.

I am not arguing here that PMO is the answer to a void in project sponsorship inside an organisation, certainly not. And I fully recognize that any role a PMO does play in this area should only be an interim solution whilst a proper and mature sponsorship practice is developed. Indeed not even the best willed PMO can offer everything that a sponsor should provide but that said there would be a very strong argument that, in the absence of a 'good' project sponsor, the PMO can fill a void.

Something is definitely better than nothing in this case.

### **3. Communication Breakdown**

Working for a Japanese company I assumed the project management role some four months in to the project, there was another project manager before me, a colleague, who had decided to 'move on'(I will make no comment...).

Being a diligent and conscientious project manager I sat down with the team and reviewed the plan and the schedule, looked at progress to date and assessed the overall situation.

It became rapidly clear that the project was going to be late, and instead of a 'go live' date of 1<sup>st</sup> February it was more likely that a 'go live' date of 1<sup>st</sup> May was achievable.

Anticipating the discussion I was going to have to have with the customer's project manager first, and then the steering committee later, I dutifully researched and documented the reasons behind the slippage of three months.

In all honesty, they were 95% down to the customer. What my predecessor had failed to do was to communicate these slippages in an appropriate way. I could find all the causes and consequences buried deep down in the copious project status reports (each one an average of 12 pages long!) but none of this had risen to the surface at recent project meetings or steering meetings and therefore this was all going to be a bit of a shock.

So, fully prepared for my meeting later with the customer, I needed to head off to see another customer just down the road. As I left I commented to my technical architect that I was off, would be back 3pm, and 'would give the bad news then'.

I left. I returned.

The first person I met on my return was my technical architect who cheerfully informed me that he had met the customer project manager at the coffee machine earlier and gave him the news.

And the result?

Well I had a tough meeting, and I never got the opportunity to present the facts of the situation and build up to the consequences in a proper manner. I was on the back foot from the moment I walked in the door and never recovered. I was also replaced on the project in a few weeks and the third project manager assumed control and delivered the project (on the 1<sup>st</sup> May by the way).

Our sins: We had failed to communicate from the start of the project in an appropriate way, and when there was bad news we communicated in an inappropriate and casual manner without control or consideration. My failure was that I did not communicate well enough to my project team what I intended to do and why I wanted to do it this way, nor the potential consequences of not being able to do it this way.

## About Our Author



### **Speaker: Author: Trainer: Coach: Consultant**

Peter Taylor is a dynamic and commercially astute professional who has achieved notable success in business. His background is in project management and marketing across three major business areas over the last 28 years and with the last 8 years building and leading PMOs.

He is an accomplished communicator, a professional speaker, workshop trainer and PM/PMO consultant.

Peter is the author of '*The Lazy Project Manager*', '*The Lazy Winner*' and '*The Lazy Project Manager and the Project from Hell*' (Infinite Ideas), as well as '*Leading Successful PMOs*' (Gower).

More information can be found at [www.thelazyprojectmanager.com](http://www.thelazyprojectmanager.com) and [www.leadingsuccessfulpmos.com](http://www.leadingsuccessfulpmos.com) and [www.thelazywinner.com](http://www.thelazywinner.com) – and through his free podcasts in iTunes.

