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Features and Functionality Myopia:

Our Impudent Project Manager "Reaches" for Success

By Dick Billows, president
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Even amid the fog of shouted due dates and lists of features and functionalities, we need to reach for business value when we scope projects. Even a little additional "reach" gives us:

- Better odds of project success
- Improved credibility as a problem-solver
- User/client relationships that are more like partnerships than fast-food order-taking.

Let's take a simple business situation and watch our hero(ine), the Impudent Project Manager, see through the fog.

Business Situation

Chris Pimbok, the Impudent Project Manager, strode down the rich red carpet of the corporate hallway, stopping now and then to graciously autograph Gantt charts for admiring project management groupies. Chris turned into the office of a new user/client executive, Pat Wereinamess, noting the paper-strewn desk, Pat's worry-creased forehead and the stack of unanswered pink message slips on the floor.

"Finally," Pat barked impatiently. "I called more than 30 minutes ago! Anyway, you're here."

After the warm welcome, Pat pushed aside some of the papers on the desktop and located a stapled stack of yellow pages. "This mess in the file room is a Priority #1 project and a number of executives will be watching this very closely. We need a file room tracking system so we can locate these customer files instantly. We've already laid out the information we need to track each file so you can start immediately. How soon can you get it done? By next Friday?" With an intimidating frown, Pat waved sheets of paper covered with field names and report sketches at Chris and added, "I have no time to listen to the usual project mumbo-jumbo. You can work with Dana, my assistant on all the details."

The Impudent Project Manager flicked some dust off Pat's visitor chair and sat down, enjoying a serene inner smile. This was the point where the



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techno-wiz kids and PM rookies made their first, fatal mistake. Some of them would take the specs and agree to the completion date, thinking that kind of eager puppy-dog behavior would earn the executive's admiration.

Sure, those PM puppies could quickly get a list of requirements, secure Pat's approval of them and start work immediately. Most foolish of all, these eager puppy dogs thought that delivering that list of requirements by that date would equal project success. Trying to hide behind "We delivered all the technical specs" never works when a project produces nothing of business value. "Functional reach" projects are a tempting trap.

"Functional Reach" Projects

The Impudent Project Manager knew that functional reach projects seem safe. The executive has detailed exactly what features and functions are needed. So why not grab it, end our scope definition effort now and run from the muck of the user/client world? That would bring to an end the need for those messy operational discussions with the user and lets us "do our thing." We won't have to deal with cross-functional issues and after all, we do have an order we can fill and that order is in our language.

But instead of sensing safety in what has taken place, a warning foghorn had boomed in the Impudent Project Manager's head. The executive was splitting a solution effort into two "functional reach" projects; a technical project and the unmentioned user process change project where the file-tracking application would be coupled with process changes to fix the mess. And, the Impudent PM mused, there might be a flock of other related functional reach projects aimed at this same business problem. Now maybe this will work just great. But when the pieces of the solution aren't integrated, the odds of success are poor and the Impudent PM knew which piece would earn the lion's share of the blame when no business value emerged at the end.

The Impudent Project Manager also mused about the character of the user executive's relationship with project managers. The executive was not asking for technical input on a business problem. Pat was accustomed to dealing with PMs whose interests did not reach into that realm; they were interested only in taking orders.

Pat frowned as the Impudent PM sat down and said, "I need to understand what end result you want or I'm not going to be able to do a really good job for you."

"I give the orders here and you have yours on those sheets of paper."

"You do give the orders but there are two ways to do it. You can order from me like you had just pulled up to a drive-in window or you can give me your order as if you were a customer in an elegant French restaurant



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where I help you blend choices from a lengthy menu and wine list into a superb meal. If this project is really important, let's make it a superb meal.”

Pat gave a grudging nod and said, “Okay. The problem is that the paper files that hold all our customer history are strewn all over this building. People from all departments use them without signing them out and return them only when they feel like it. That's why we need a tracking system and better file room process. Frankly, there are so many complaints that the file room mess was discussed at last week's executive meeting!”

The Impudent Project Manager nodded and asked, “But we have an automated customer history system, updated in real-time. Why don't people use it?”

“It's a disaster. They have to look at so many screens that they actually prefer the paper files even though they are a mess and usually out of date.”

Operational Reach Projects

The Impudent PM considered the additional information gleaned from “pushing back” on the functional reach project. Now the odds of project success were higher because the scope would include more than just those specifications. The Impudent PM knew that “reaching” for the scope could stop here, with the project's Measure of Success™ being a metric on improvement in the file room's service to its users. Either the tracking system/file room process changes or a fix to the Customer Service System's GUIs might deliver this Measure of Success™.

But the Impudent Project Manager also knew that to maximize the business value of the project, and to maintain PM superstar status, an effort had to be made to reach even further.

The Impudent PM asked, “I understand why your users are complaining about the file room. But please tell me about the impact the file room is having on their performance.”

Pat frowned and gave an exasperated sigh.

The Impudent Project Manager added, “I'm just that waiter in the French Restaurant, looking to earn a really big tip by delighting you with your meal.”

“They tell me that they have to call the majority of customers back or keep them on hold forever while they get the info to answer questions or solve problems.”

“Well,” the Impudent Project Manager said, “Maybe improving that metric should be our target.”

Pat nodded, smiled for the first time and said, “You're not like any project manager I've ever dealt with!”

“No, I'm not.”



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External Reach Projects

The Impudent Project Manager relaxed against the back of Pat's visitor chair. They had reached beyond service to another department and now the project's Measure of Success™ might reach to the customer. But even if the scope of the final project was limited to a shorter functional reach, the Impudent Project Manager has a "big picture" perspective, which will improve the odds of success on any of the shorter reach alternatives. And, there is the opportunity to meld a gaggle of functional and operational reach projects into one external reach project, which will deliver significant value.

Why Reach So Far?

Organizations fall prey to doing, and then redoing, flocks of functional and operational reach projects because the disconnected efforts never solve the big problems at which they are targeted. Organizations need project managers who can reach for bigger business value during the scoping process.

Successful consultants reach for the business value because it not only increases the fees but also yields more satisfied clients and eliminates competitors who just take orders. When we deliver projects with significant reach, we develop partnerships with user/client executives because we are addressing their issues, not the shorter reach concerns of their subordinates and technical staff.

Project portfolio managers in IT departments or firms might also want to examine their inventory of projects to assess how resources are allocated to each reach category. A preponderance of short reach projects often generates client or user relationship problems.

Not an Easy Process

Our example situation made it pretty easy for the Impudent Project Manager to reach further and further. There was only one decision-maker to work with and, thus, no need to work up the management hierarchy to reach further and further. We also developed just a single "daisy-chain" of measured outcomes, not the High-level Achievement Network™ which is necessary in most business situations. To learn more about our Achievement-driven Project Management (AdPM™) or to consistently apply them in your organization, visit our website, <http://www.4pm.com> and take a look at our books and training courses.

To find out more about this topic, consider enrolling in a course or buy a book.