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1 – Lessons Never Learned

We will begin by sitting in on a "lessons learned" meeting for a failed project. Though a gloomy way to introduce the topics we're going to cover in this book, it gives us an inventory of many of the PM problems that are all too typical in today's project management environment. After all, the point of this book is to help you avoid each one of them.

The project manager doodled with a green fountain pen in the margin of the blank "Lessons Learned" document, sketching figures of project managers hanging from a noose. The PM had notified all the project's players of the meeting but everyone was late, just like during the project. A few of the project team members straggled in. The PM received crisp nods from some team members but many just went to their seats, eyes downcast. They'd all worked pretty hard. Oh, there were a couple that goofed off and played some games with duration estimates. However, the team members' hard work had produced nothing for them except association with a failed project. The resentment on most of their faces clearly signaled that they blamed the PM for the failure.

Some Operations staff members tromped in as a group, led by the VP of Operations who'd had almost no involvement at the beginning of the project and whose time investment grew exponentially as deadline after deadline was missed. They were followed by supervisors from the Accounting and Customer Service departments. Last to enter were the team members from the Information Systems department who looked like they were marching to the guillotine for beheading.

"My gosh, yet another meeting," the VPO sneered. "We're still trying to fix the mess upstairs! If anything, the number of customer complaints and billing errors are even worse than before we started this disaster."

The VP of Marketing said, without sitting down, "This latest disaster is affecting the quality of customer care and neither I nor any member of the executive staff will tolerate that. It must be fixed immediately."

With that, the VP of Marketing turned and left the room.

In the silence that followed the departure, the PM capped the fountain pen, thinking that this was a wonderful way to begin the meeting and said, "Well, the idea of the "lessons learned" meeting is to try to identify what went wrong so we can improve the way we do projects."

"You people," the VPO snapped, looking around at everybody in the room, "have to do a lot better! We cannot keep having these project disasters."

"We delivered every requirement you specified even though the software you folks picked was crap," barked a member of the Information Systems staff, already red in the face.

The VPO snapped back, "Go tell that to the customers who are still complaining about our billing system and how long it takes us to straighten out problems."

The PM knew it was time to regain control of the meeting. "One of the problems with our planning was that we didn't focus on reducing the number of complaints. In the beginning, we only talked about the new fancy reports that everyone wanted. Then the list of requirements kept growing every week."

From the expressions on the faces of the first-line supervisors, the PM knew the last comment was a mistake.

"It kept growing because you never gave us what we wanted," one of the supervisors said.

The VPO pushed back from the table and stood up, "This is getting us nowhere!" Then the VPO pointed a finger at the PM's face and said, "You were seven months late and \$300,000 over budget and we still have the same problems."

The VPO turned and took two steps toward the door before whirling back and saying, "And what I like the least about the way you people do projects is that all the bad news always comes at the end, when we can't do anything about it!"

BAD SURPRISES WHEN IT'S TOO LATE

As the project team and some Administrative Staff members continued the debate, the PM thought about the VPO's last words. There had been a lot of bad news late in the project. Sure, some of it came from overly optimistic estimates and some from scope creep. However, as the completion date kept getting pushed out, people got very nervous about reporting any more slippage. Whenever they did, the sky fell on them from all quarters. Including, the PM had to admit, from the project manager. Although they should have been honest enough to report problems, the PM could have done a better job accepting bad news and protecting them from executive tongue-lashings. The PM knew that getting bad news was better than not hearing about it because then no corrective action was possible. Another real problem was not having the tools to spot small problems early. With the project plan they had built, both the team members' status reporting and the PM's reporting were subjective. No one really knew how the project was going until they got near the end.

A supervisor's angry voice broke the PM's reverie, "We never understood that technical mumbo jumbo you made us sign off on! And none of you have any business telling us to change the way we operate in our department. You need to adapt to our way of doing things."

"The idea of these projects is to make improvement, not preserve the status quo from 1960!" a Business Office manager sneered.

CHANGES, CHANGES AND MORE CHANGES

Sure, they'd tried to "freeze" the project requirements and they'd gone through a very thorough approval and sign off process on all the process and technical specifications. But then every week the list of features and functionalities grew. People saw a report, screen layout or workflow change and said, "This won't work for us the way you've got it." Then the project team

We "frame" the project within business requirements that link departmental achievements within measured business results

member would say, "Well, I'll have to fill out a change request because that's a change and it'll take more time and cost more money." The two would go around and around debating whether this was or was not a change and it would be escalated. Then the same debate would occur at a higher level with everyone becoming more and more angry. Most times the change was added to the plan but usually with no corresponding increase in budget or duration. If the PM insisted on budget and duration increases to reflect the cost of a change in the project, the team was blamed for doing a poor job of laying out the project requirements.

The fact was that the operating department supervisors did not understand the technical language of the requirements and the vendors and technical staff never understood the needs of the operating areas. It was also true that neither the PM nor anyone else had a clear understanding of the business and performance results that the stakeholders in Operations, Marketing and Accounting were seeking from the project. Of course, all those stakeholders delegated their planning role to lower-level subordinates and never gave them any direction. So the initial plan provided no strategic framework and left the door wide open for an endless series of changes.

PROJECT TEAM WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

The PM scanned the angry frustrated faces of the project team members. The original completion date had been "plucked from the sky" before the PM had even been selected as project manager, much less done any analysis. The PM argued about the date but got nowhere trying to convince the executives of the impossibility of reaching it. As a result, the duration and work estimates were jokes and everyone on the project team knew they would fail to hit the due date before they even started work. As a result, they had no commitment to their individual due dates. The situation got worse when the stakeholders kept adding new requirements with few increases in budget or duration.

What really dragged the project team into their deep depression was the hours they had to work. Most of them were on several projects but no one was managing their overall workloads or setting priorities in terms of which project's work should come first. All those functional managers' promises of "full support" proved to be worth very little because they pulled their people off the project whenever something came up.

Just then, a Customer Service supervisor raised the 60-page project plan over his head and threw it at the garbage can, missing by four feet and scattering Gantt charts all over the floor. The PM looked at all those Gantt charts fluttering to the conference room floor and wondered if the project plan had been a little too detailed. They started the planning with a lot of talk about the business outcomes and clear direction. But all the pressure to get started with the work led to the project plan being little more than a very detailed list of micro-activities. Was that micro-management, the PM wondered? Moreover, the plan had not really specified the things required from administrative areas, like process changes and staffing. Either way the project plan had been useless. They were only two weeks into the effort when people started saying, "We've already done that" or "We can't do that yet because..." so all those details in the project plan really didn't provide the project team with guidance. In addition, some of the more

Team members who have to guess the end result that is expected from them don't give us their "best work" nor do those we micromanage

experienced people seemed to make a point of doing things in sequences other than what was laid out in the project plan. They explained that they'd found a better way to do it but the PM often felt that their point was just to do it differently than the plan.

In the still rapidly deteriorating "lessons learned" meeting, a project team member screamed, "Why didn't you tell us in the beginning about the big problem with customer complaints?"

"We did!" chorused the three remaining people from Customer Service.

"Oh, you mentioned it but two thirds of what we did had nothing to do with reducing customer complaints."

PLANNING, MISSION STATEMENT MUSH

That last exchange captured the essence of the project. As dumb as it sounded, they had done a great deal of irrelevant work and it wasn't until toward the middle of the project that they understood how the Executive Staff would measure the business success of the project. The PM sighed in exasperation. That lack of understanding of the business purpose had also made change control impossible. Instead of being able to evaluate the change requests based on whether or not they contributed to the desired business results, they were left with only the ability to argue about the vague "value" of changes.

The PM wondered what they could have done differently. During the planning, the VPs hardly gave them a moment of time; delegating planning to lower-level decision-makers who were equally unaware of the criteria that would be used to judge the project success. Why wouldn't the VPs give them any time? Probably because every meeting they ever had with them was devoted to detailed technical discussions that simply were not of interest to that level of decision-maker. Instead of focusing on business achievements that were objectively measurable, the PM settled for mission statement mush, which was approved because there was nothing in it but vague generalities.

The PM tiredly rose and left the room, thinking two thoughts. First, this happens to us over and over again but we never learn any lessons from it. Second, wouldn't it be nice if I could do it all over again.

ACHIEVEMENT-DRIVEN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

We'll develop techniques to address these problems in the remaining chapters of this book. We'll also work through the unique aspects of project management in the cross-functional environment and the unique stakeholder issues with which PMs must cope. The foundation for these techniques will be our Achievement-driven Project Management Methodology (AdPM™). In it, we frame the project within unambiguous business achievements that define success for both the project as a whole and each of its components. Measured achievements require that we think about end results, rather than just activities, before we start work. However, the payoff for the PM who makes this intellectual investment comes each week in the form of:

- ❑ Team members who know what is expected of them before they start work
- ❑ Executives who understand what they are "buying" from the project and, as importantly, what's not included

- ❑ Scope and change control processes that are based on hard-edged objective data, not opinion
- ❑ Smaller project plans that are easily maintained and updated so the PM knows exactly where the problems are.

It is normal for all of us to think in activity terms; what we want people to do. To conceive measured achievements we need to go a step further. We need to think about what we want people to do and then how we will assess their performance when they are finished. This latter measurement is our measured achievement. Let’s consider a few examples of activities and their conversion to measured achievements:

Activity	Measured Achievement We Can Verify	Type of Measured Achievement
Complete the design	CIO approves system design	Approval achievement – We measure success by an executive or a technical reviewer signing off
Develop new billing statement	98% statements mailed within 2 day of EOM	Metric that we can objectively verify
Design billing system prototype	Billing system approved by Quality Assurance as complying with Standard Operating Procedure #6	Approval achievement that meets a published standard
Tally number of bills on hold	Bills on hold total less than \$100,000	Metric that we can calculate
Correct billing errors	98% of errors corrected within 1 business day	Metric that we can objectively measure

While the measured achievements in the middle column are in a number of forms, each gives us, or the person doing the work, a clear and unambiguous performance expectation. It tells them when they will be done and makes clear what level of performance is required. For project executives, measured achievements detail what they are getting and what they are not getting. We quantify expectations before we start work, not halfway through the project. This is a real asset in scope control. Consider the activity of correcting billing errors shown above. Laying out this clear end result tells the team member the standard they must meet. It also tells an executive the error correction expectation. If that level is not good enough, we can change the plan now rather than redoing the assignment later.

Let’s look at how we’ll use this measured achievement thinking in our project management process.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS (MOS™) & ACHIEVEMENT NETWORK (HLA™)

The most significant measured achievement in our plan is the measure of success (MOS™). It quantifies business success for the project as a whole and “frames” the entire effort. Once we have stakeholder agreement and approval of the MOS™, we’ll construct a network of high-level achievements that are the principal ingredients required to deliver the MOS™. Not all of these HLAs™ will be related to customer service, if that is the target of our MOS™. Some will capture the Billing department achievements and others may require IS efforts. As an example, say we have a project to build a customer history system for our Customer Services department. When we understand their MOS™ of decreasing the time it takes to respond to a customer’s inquiry by 25%, we’ll build a high-level achievement network that includes not only system achievements but also achievements for training the staff and altering their internal departmental processes. These high-level achievements usually span functional and departmental boundaries and including them in the plan gives us the information about

how our entire effort has to support the MOST™. As well, within a given organizational sub-unit we may need achievements from other departments or functional areas. The important point is that we want to manage an integrated cross-functional effort because that improves the odds of success for the entire project.

Before we work through the planning process, there is a core technique that we'll use in Broadbrush planning and throughout the project; it's called quantified trade-offs.

TRADE-OFFS AND SCOPE CONTROL

Our measured achievement focus lays the groundwork for managing with quantified trade-offs. The trade-offs we will work with come from the "four corners" of the project we will develop. Instead of describing the project with a budget, due date and a long narrative, we describe it with four quantified dimensions. These 4-Corners are:

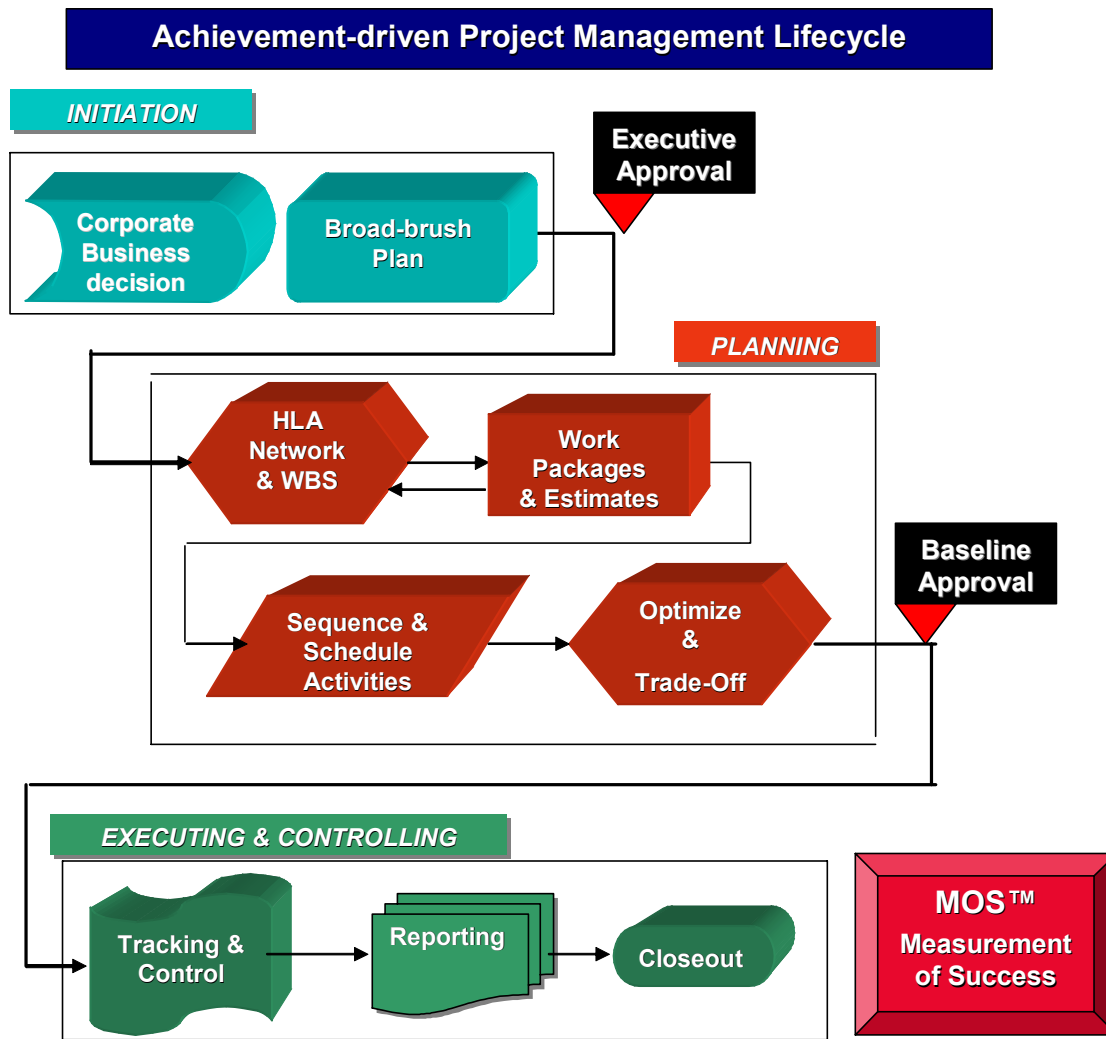
- ❑ Measure of Success (MOST™)
- ❑ Budget
- ❑ Duration
- ❑ Risk (probability of success)

Our intent is to build a project plan where each of these four corners is quantified and we can discuss quantified trade-offs between them. We establish the idea of trade-offs between these four corners early in the project and then we will use it for scope control during:

- ❑ Detailed planning
- ❑ The final project approval presentation and
- ❑ Every week as we track actual results and deal with changes and problems.

Rather than trying to "fight" with stakeholders about changes to the plan or changes to the requirements, we will present data on these trades-off before they ask. If the executives wish to shorten the duration of the project, we will calculate the impact on one or more of the other corners of the project. We can certainly shorten the duration but the trade-off may increase the cost, reduce what we achieve or lower the probability of success. This trade-off approach is the key to maintaining a high probability of project success because it gives us a data-based approach to change and scope control. It also allows stakeholders to exercise strategic control over what they are "buying" from the project and that can earn us many benefits in our relationships with the different audiences with which we have to deal.

Executives are accustomed to controlling & evaluating projects with only one measurable dimension, duration, or at most two, budget & duration. We'll give them four and much better decision-making about trade-offs.



Our project management lifecycle diagram summarizes the Achievement-driven Project Management (AdPM™) process we'll be following throughout the remainder of the book.

The project plan flows from the stakeholders' decisions about business objectives in measured achievement form. It gives us a strategic framework that we will verify with our Broadbrush planning process. Then we'll detail the plan to build a foundation for executive decision-making and tracking project progress.

2 - Strategic Project Planning

In this chapter, we'll work through the process of strategic project planning, seeking to “frame” our project within boundaries of measured business outcomes. We'll also work with the stakeholders to establish and gain their approval of the strategic framework for the project and the processes we'll use to deliver the end result. The strategic plan includes:

- ❑ An objective measure of project success (MOST™)
- ❑ A high-level achievement network (HLA™) which lays out in measurable terms our path to the MOST™. It quantifies the boundaries of the project's scope including achievements from all involved departments
- ❑ Assessment of risks, mitigation strategy and strategic assumptions
- ❑ The project charter including authority structures and accountability relationships
- ❑ Change control processes and decision-making rules.

Having this framework in place before we start work not only substantially increases the probability of the project being a success in the stakeholders' eyes but also provides solid scope control. However, strategic planning is a difficult process, which is why it is skipped in so many projects.

WHY WE SKIP STRATEGIC PROJECT PLANNING

Most cross-functional projects start with the assembly of a grocery list of requirements that continues to grow during the project because there is no strategic plan to restrain the expansion of the project or target its success. We have little ability to define what's in and what's out of the project. Oh, we see long narratives supposedly defining scope and objectives but they rarely contain objectively measurable definitions of success or the verifiable steps we'll take to reach that end business result. So why do people skip strategic planning? Because it requires that we:

- ❑ Gain access to and the participation of stakeholders and executive-level decision-makers
- ❑ Learn about the performance requirements of each functional unit
- ❑ Speak the stakeholders' language
- ❑ Secure performance commitments up front
- ❑ Cope with the conflict that occurs whenever we make tough decisions
- ❑ Conceive a cross-functional effort that spans functional “silos” and nudges the hierarchy just a bit.

When projects are defined solely as the implementation of a new system, we are unlikely to have satisfied stakeholders at the end or produce value for the organization.

No wonder people skip this strategic planning; it's so much easier just to start work and hope for the best. Let's explore several of these challenges in more detail.

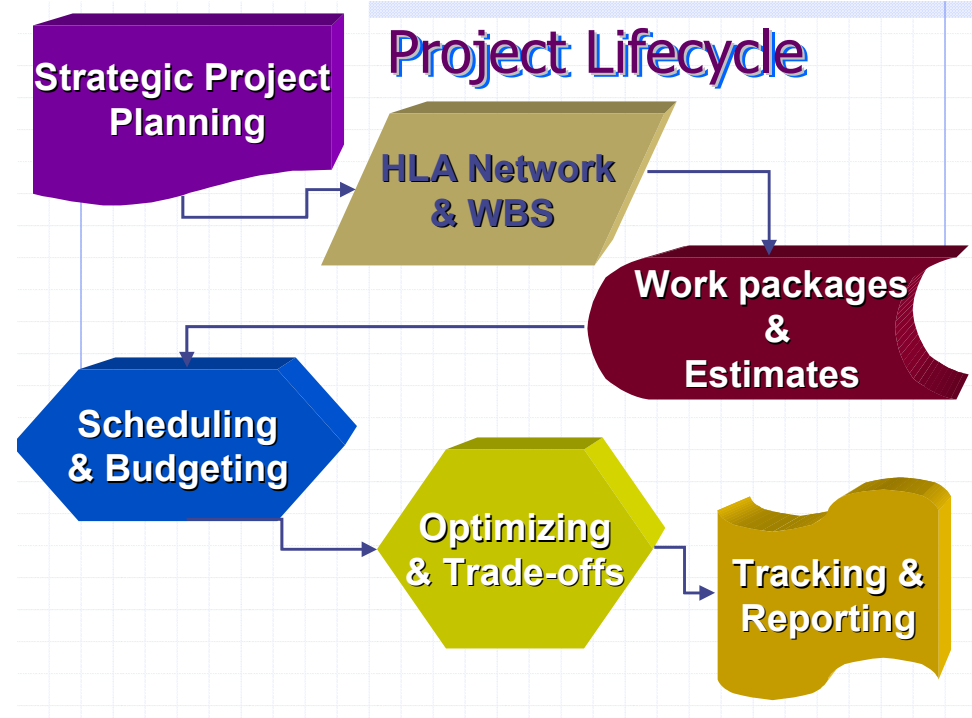
First, the language of strategic planning is not about activities, it's about end results. While it's easier and more comfortable to talk about the means, we need to talk about the ends first. We talk the stakeholders' language and our discussions are not limited to what they want but focus on what they will achieve with the new capability the project will provide. Our focus is not on products, equipment, data collection systems or customer billing procedures. It is on the measured impact the project will have on "customer care" and the "customer data collection." When we dive into the details of a department's operations, we encounter resistance... sometime fierce resistance. It is always easier to assemble a list of their wants than it is to secure their commitment to what they will achieve and what they will deliver with those systems or equipment. Many who will be in these discussions will want to get into the delicious technical details or talk about what the screen on the new equipment should look like, not what we have to achieve for the business. The PM and project team members can be their own worst enemy in this regard. We are more comfortable talking about areas of our expertise than the stakeholders' business. However, we need to engage executive decision-makers in this process. We quickly lose them if we let the planning sink into the "activity trap" of technical details, equipment or processes.

Second, few PMs enjoy conflict and good strategic planning triggers it. Moreover, this conflict is usually with people with higher rank or status. Rather than burying disagreements, a strategic planning process that focuses on hard-edged and measurable business results brings them to the surface. We're not creating conflict. Rather, we want to resolve as much of the existing conflict over business results and "what's in the project" as early as possible. No project can meet all of the different stakeholders' expectations. The key question is when in the process we face these conflicts and start to control the scope. We can defer the existing conflicts or schmooze them over in the interest of "getting off to a good start," and then face them toward the end when changes are many times more expensive. Alternatively, we can begin scope control early, which is much better than waiting until the duration and budget start to slip.

Those are some of the challenges we face in cross-functional project planning. As a rule of thumb, every hour spent on this process saves 10 hours during the life of the project. The two-step strategic planning process we'll use to frame our tactical planning substantially increases the probability of delivering the business results the stakeholders want within the time frame and budget to which we will commit. With an approved strategic plan, we begin the project with:

- ❑ The ability to focus our efforts on objectively measurable business results
- ❑ Executive agreement on the measured path we will take to reach those end results
- ❑ Commitment from the stakeholders to the achievements they must deliver as part of the effort
- ❑ Executive understanding of the risks inherent in the project and the cost of mitigating those risks
- ❑ Clear authority and accountability relationships across functional lines
- ❑ Executive agreement on the processes and procedures for making the inevitable changes.

Figure 1 Project Lifecycle



THE PROJECT CASE STUDY

Let’s dive into the case study we will use to illustrate techniques and tools throughout the remainder of the book. It concerns an organization's launch of a new product and the operational and systems changes that it requires. To develop all the components of the strategic plan, we'll see our project manager fight through the principal difficulties in completing a strategic plan and pick up new techniques along the way.

OUR PROJECT AT MILLENNIUM VIRTUAL

Terry Johnston pressed down the metal clasp over the Lessons Learned document and then closed the last of the blue work-paper binders on the just completed project. Carrying the folder to the file shelves, Terry smiled at the now orderly office after months of stepping over files and papers. It was a nice feeling to close out the last of the documentation on an extremely successful project. Now hopefully there'd be a few weeks of recuperation before starting the next project, whatever it might be. The phone rang, breaking the easy rhythms of the local jazz station. Terry punched the talk button on the speakerphone and heard,

“Terry, this is Vic Grossman. Glad I caught you. We need to get going on a big project.”

Millennium Virtual, where Victor Grossman was VP of Marketing, was one of the area’s emerging big-name companies. They made the transition from a high-tech venture launched by three engineers in a garage to a modern corporation known for their high rate of growth and the growing pains that went with it.

After a quick exchange of pleasantries, Vic said, “We have a hot new product, the XMR-4gig which gives us an opportunity for some big revenue growth with our existing customer base. It’s also got the potential of getting us into new segments where, with some work, we can sell the rest of the product line. The problem is that the XMR-4gig is a low cost, high-volume item with lower margins than our big-ticket stuff. So we need to make a ton of changes in the way we do business or the profits from the new product will be eaten up by operating cost increases. I’m getting the usual run-around from operations and the VP of Sales and some of our salespeople are turning up their noses at selling the XMR-4gig.”

Terry said, “Sounds like the impact will be monstrous. Monstrous good and maybe monstrous bad.”

“You haven’t heard the worst yet”, Victor replied. “As soon as I mentioned reducing the cost of order taking and operations for the new product, the Board went off on a tangent about our general inefficiency and all the customer complaints. Then they started talking about costs of capturing and entering orders. Then some troublemaker mentioned how much wasted effort there is transcribing all the salespeople’s customer orders and wondered if we couldn’t actually save money by having everyone, star salespeople included, enter all their own data. Dana Joseph, the VP of Sales, went ballistic, pointing to the sales numbers and the sales growth. But another board member point out that profits were flat so operating costs had to be reduced.”

“I bet that went over real well, after it leaked out,” Terry interjected.

“Oh it leaked all right,” Vic agreed. “And, lots of Dana’s salespeople, particularly the prima-donna rainmakers who bring in lots of business, are upset. There’s a lot of big talk about not being data entry operators. But the fact of the matter is that we have to cut our costs and the salespeople will have to operate without all the clerical support. Now, darn near every one of them has a full time customer service assistant who they call to place orders, research shipping status and so on. What’s worse, each of those sales assistants keeps their own private customer histories in paper files which make it impossible to find things and impossible for my staff to do effective market research and customer tracking. That all comes from the old days and we need to fix it. We just can’t sell the new product that way because each of those salespeople will want a second assistant if we let them operate the way they do now. We need to cut costs and we can by connecting all the salespeople to our SELL system with portable handheld devices. If we can save some money, or at least offset some of the costs by cutting the clerical staff, that would be great. Confidentially, the VP of Finance, Lanny Wilkenson, and I are also concerned about the billing errors that result from the way we process orders. The quotes we give customers are wrong because there is no central control of prices. Funny how the errors are always for a lower price and then of course we have to live with the wrong price we gave a customer. I can’t prove it but I think a lot of those errors seem very convenient...you know when a sales person is in a tough competitive situation and wants a lower price without the hassle of getting it approved? I’ll be the point person for the project but we’ll be affecting a lot of departments.”

"Well, Vic," Terry replied, "I'm not telling you anything you don't know when I say this is a monumental undertaking. Tell me more about the resources that will be available for the project and the budget that was approved last night."

Vic replied, "I wouldn't be honest if I didn't tell you the budget will be tight. However, I think we have the opportunity to identify some cost savings that we can channel back to pay for the project. Regarding the resources, everybody has promised full cooperation."

While twirling the phone cord, Terry tried to think back about how many times that phrase about "full cooperation" had been mentioned at just about this point in a new project. "Great, Vic. When can we get together on this?" Terry asked.

Terry and Vic set the date for a Millennium Steering Committee meeting and exchanged goodbyes.

INVITATION TO THE ACTIVITY TRAP

Two days later, Terry pulled back one of the red leather chairs in Millennium's boardroom. A tall thin man Terry recognized as a manager from the Billing department groaned, "So we have only nine months from today until we start selling the XMR-4gig."

Terry glanced around the table and recognized just about everyone. There were supervisors and managers representing Billing, Customer Service, Accounting, Sales, Marketing other departments that would be affected by the XMR-4gig. However, not a single VP or director-level decision-maker was in attendance. Even Vic had failed to attend.

"The first thing we have to talk about," Terry began, "is the new product and the SELL system."

The manager from Billing responded, "This project is a whole lot bigger than that. This whole thing is about the efficient collection of data. Now, half of the organization is using the SELL system for orders and inquiries, which includes most of the info we're required to have. The other half is on paper and the interface causes endless problems for us in Billing and most everyone else. We have to get everyone on one system, the SELL system, first."

A manager from sales said, "The SELL system is totally inadequate for our needs. Why rock the boat, we're in good shape now."

"Right," the billing manager sneered, "You can set the prices a whatever you want."

"You folks in Billing just don't understand the real world out there, we need to fight for business!"

There were a few grumbles in the room. Then a red-haired woman Terry recognized from Information Systems (IS) said, "The portable devices they're talking about can feed the SELL system rather easily. With a lot more of those terminals, we can provide the kind of access the sales assistants will need. Although there may be fewer assistants if what I hear about all the salespeople doing their own data entry is true."

"We tried those darn things," another sales manager snapped, "and we had all kinds of problems with the hand-held devices. I have a list of examples we've put together. What we need are more sales assistants to transcribe orders."

Terry hesitated before responding, "All of your points are well taken and we need to get clarification and resolution on all those issues for the project."

Even without any upper-level decision-makers in the meeting, Terry knew it was still worth getting an initial list put together. "Let's surface the other issues you feel will need to be addressed."

Over the next half hour, Terry heard from each department representative and assembled the following list:

- ❑ Reduce the data collection burden and duplication by entering "electronic orders"
- ❑ Improve the interfaces between sales, billing, and accounting
- ❑ Reduce the number of bills on hold awaiting price verification
- ❑ Improve customer service by reducing red tape and responding faster.

Terry closed the meeting and headed directly to Vic's office. After a short wait, Terry sat down in the chair in front of Vic's big cherrywood desk and got right to the point, "Vic, we are already headed for disaster. We only got middle managers and supervisors at the planning session because the decision-makers all delegated the project planning downward. Not a single VP or department director showed up. You know as well as I do that we need to set the overall strategic framework or this project will just wallow in interdepartmental bickering and people's resistance to change."

Vic grimaced, "I'm sorry about not coming but we had an emergency meeting of the Executive Staff on another issue."

Terry pressed on, "If we don't get started on the right foot and have a clear sense of direction we will go nowhere fast. I need time from the other VPs to set the strategy."

"I understand, Terry, I really do. Maybe you can use what you got today at least to get started, remember we only have nine months. Then when things calm down you and I can plan this thing as we...?"

AVOIDING THE ACTIVITY TRAP

We've come to the first moment of truth in this project. We have stakeholders that are ready to deluge us with a list of what each department needs while at the same time pushing us very hard to get started so we can hit an already determined finish date. We have absolutely no idea how the stakeholders will evaluate the success of the project nor do we know what specific business benefits they are seeking from the project. We also have no commitments at all from decision-makers on what they will deliver for the project. This is not an unusual situation for a project manager.

There's no doubt that we could carefully record every one of the many requirements that are bouncing around. We could then develop a detailed technical specification to deliver that laundry list of requirements. Stakeholders from the various departments would be happy with how quickly we have started work on the project. Of course, we would have no ability to control the scope of the project, no chance of finishing in this millennium and the cost might well exceed the gross national product of a small country. Worst of all, many aspects of the project hinge on bringing about organizational change in the organization. Our decision-makers are, it seems, avoiding even discussing that due to the inherent conflicts.