

Convincing Executives of the Value of Project Management Processes

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This White Paper discusses the value of project management processes in an organization and offers an approach to convincing executives of that value.

Project Management Processes provide value to organizations of all sizes, shapes, and charters. From large scale projects managed by senior project managers to small scale efforts performed by occasional practitioners with little if any project management training, a common set of processes improves project results as measured in quality, time, and cost. Whether discussed anecdotally or within the framework of the Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute Capability Maturity Model®, of this there is no doubt. But, how does one make a case to convince executives of the value of project management processes to the organization? The precise argument will be different from company to company because each workplace has its own culture, a unique set of problems that it faces, and differing experiences and views on the value of processes and “best practices” in general.

Each workplace has its own culture. Some workplaces seek change in quantum leaps, others prefer step by step gradual change, and there are those that resist any kind and all forms of change. Knowing the culture of the workplace and making improvement recommendations in a manner that the workplace can accept is tremendously important in bringing about effective and lasting change.

What are the unique set of problems that the workplace faces? Some workplaces are short of staff and simply can not get the planned work done on time. Often, resources are reassigned, jeopardizing other projects. Other workplaces may have high incidences of errors and required rework, impacting project results. Some of these errors may be systematic while others may be related to the skill levels of not just the project manager, but all those involved in the project management process. Knowing the unique set of problems that you face, not just the remedy, will greatly help in getting others around you to understand and support your case.

Differing experiences and views on the value of processes and “best practices” exist in every organization. Some organizations embrace processes and “best

Processes On Demand is a project management process solution that reduces costs and improves project management results. It provides access to process descriptions, scalable workflows, step by step guidance, tools, PM templates, and resources suggestions to help project managers and all those involved in the Project Management Process.

practices” as a way of reducing defects, eliminating waste, and maximizing performance. Such organizations that have experienced first hand the business value of processes, will be likely to adopt processes and “best practices” for project management as well. Workplaces without a positive track record or focus on processes will be less likely to appreciate the strategic advantage they bring to a company.

Are you feeling any pain? If your organization delivers projects okay today, then your business case would have to demonstrate how project management processes would bring improvements in measurable project results such as quality, time, and cost. To make this case, you need to present specific areas where your company is feeling pain today and clearly show how project management processes alleviate that pain. Having reviewed tangible and credible evidence of achievable value, executives will be much more open to changes and actions required to bring about desired results.

Pain Point #1 - Unusable PM Methodology Manuals. Most IT organizations and project management offices have project management methodology manuals. While these guidebooks provide very good content and approaches, in most workplaces methodologies simply don't work. They are hard to access, difficult to use, too detailed, and can't be easily changed. They focus mainly on the “what” is to be done and not the “Who, When, Where, and How”. And as methodology manuals become out of date, they cease to be useful. The resulting pain is that the performance of the project team will vary greatly and project results will be inconsistent. Contrary to this, a well defined project management process clearly shows for each step of the process not only what is to be done, but who does it, who can help (mentors), what tools and information is available to save time and assist in the effort, “how to” examples, all in the context of the customer environment. Processes, unlike methodology manuals, remain current and are continuously improved saving time, reducing costs, and improving quality.

Pain Point #2 - Too wide of variety of performance. Most organizations have a wide variety of people with different titles and skill levels that manage projects or are

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involved in the project management process. In fact, in today's workplace, the title "Project Manager" appears in almost every line of business and department. And, even those without a project manager title find themselves managing projects from time to time. Though the IT group and project management office may provide tools and training, there typically remains a fairly large gap between the experience and skill levels of the IT/PMO project managers and all those in the organization who are de facto project managers. Systems, tools, and techniques that may be well understood and used by IT and the PMO may not even be accessible by other groups. Without a project management process that is easy to access and used by all, the resulting pain is that de facto project managers and lesser skilled practitioners will manage projects less effectively than they otherwise could. Mistakes and omissions, such as developing a business case poorly or not at all, engaging in project planning prior to or instead of developing a project charter, closing the project based upon assumed client acceptance, skipping key steps as well as review and approval gates in the process, etc, will contribute to project delays, higher project costs, and project results that may not satisfy the stakeholders.

Pain Point #3 - Lack of project type scalability. Many organizations do not have project type scalability. Rather, they have a "one-size-fits-all" approach to project management. The resulting pain is twofold. Not only are short term projects over planned and controlled, but long term, complex projects may not be planned and controlled enough. Scalable project management processes alleviate this by providing project type selection guidelines that take into consideration such things as project size, scope and complexity, cost, work effort, resources, integration and procurement requirements, risk, strategic fit and benefits. Shorter term projects can be "fast-pathed" while longer term, complex projects can take full advantage of all of the process steps.

Pain Point #4 - Reinventing the wheel. Constantly reinventing the wheel is perhaps one of the biggest areas of pain most organizations face today. Project managers are constantly looking for and reinventing project management templates, forms, and checklists and it goes much further than that. There are presentation agendas, analysis techniques, and untold tutorials, self-studies, and useful information including past projects archives that almost always abundantly exists, but in a private unshared manner. The end result is not only a great loss of time as project managers individually assimilate these items, but also

a great loss of an opportunity for knowledge sharing and performance improvement.

Pain Point #5 - Lessons learned are not applied. Some organizations do not take the time to document lessons learned feedback. Perhaps worse, other organizations do take the time to document lessons learned feedback but then simply file them away with no real intention to take action. The resulting pain is that repeat mistakes and errors will be made continually. Many of these mistakes will be frustrating and some will be costly. Perhaps the biggest casualty will be that when lessons learned are not documented, reviewed, and acted upon, the resulting attitude and behavior in the workplace becomes one of complacency and "that's good enough" rather than one of continuous improvement and "how can we do better?" The value of the latter is priceless.

Summary

The case for project management processes can be built in many ways. Most workplaces within an organization have a mixed track record for delivering projects within expectations. Characteristics of these workplaces include:

- Consistently completing projects late, over budget, or not within agreed to requirements.
- Difficult to use or out of date project management methodology manuals.
- Inconsistent techniques and tools used by project managers.
- Applying project management as control reporting rather than providing value throughout the project life cycle.
- Consistent heavy stress, overtime work, and resource re-allocation to complete projects on time.
- Frustrated project managers, team members, and unhappy stakeholders.

Project management processes is the way to overcome these shortcomings. It does not mean you will not encounter problems, risks, and surprises. It does mean that you will have processes in place to deal with all contingencies.

About the author: Bernie Keh is the President and CEO of BOT International. She is Singaporean Chinese and graduated from the National University of Singapore with Honors in 1988. Prior to founding BOT International, Ms. Keh had executive and management positions with IBM, Computer Associates, and Systems Union.