

beyond... the mbh newsletter



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Major Announcement

MBH's Managing by Project methodology Intranet version 4 has been released with new procedures in all 6 modules, all developed to assist in the the successful selection, implementation and completion of your projects.

Managing by Project is a business management philosophy that utilises four basic principles in driving business value:

- Vision - the development of what your company should be in the long term
- Strategy - the high level approach to achieving that vision
- Project Selection - the feasibility of each project analysed in terms of business benefit and alignment to strategy
- Project Management - the delivery mechanism for each project

You can view a demo of this fabulous product at <http://www.mbh.com.au>

Editors Comment

Some of you may have noticed that the monthly MBH Newsletter has become a bi-monthly. Most of this is due to one of our key contributors to the newsletter leaving us due to illness. Many of you will, I'm sure, miss the depth of research and professionalism in journalism that Belinda Cogswell was able to provide us. (Belinda wrote the December and January newsletters at MBH as well as making considerable revisions to my own articles for presentations and for publication in this "illustrious" newsletter).

It is with a heavy heart, therefore, that this newsletter will be a bi-monthly at least until February 2003. However, if any readers out there would like to send us articles on project management, knowledge management, CRM, Value Chain Management or any other current buzz theory they'd like published, please do!

Now, what's in this issue? This month, we look at whether the Project Manager (as a generalisation) is a wimp without a backbone. This assertion was made by of all people, a project manager, Neal Whitten, in the June 2002 edition of PM Network (for those not fanatical about Project Management, this is the Project Management Institute's monthly magazines for members). Novembers issue will look at Knowledge Management. Is it making an Intranet style comeback or is this concept going to be one of the last of the tech wreck's concepts to die a slow and long death.

Article - The wimpy project manager

In the June 2002 edition of PM Network (p.24), Neil Whitten made the assertion that project managers don't have enough backbone at crucial stages of their project to deliver the real benefits that were originally planned in the business case. Whether this assertion of wimpiness is true or not, it is an interesting statement and is worth exploring. What is the Project Manager's role?

In many companies that MBH has been involved in, the project manager has been an accidental one; a business analyst, financial analyst or functional manager that has the project management responsibility thrust upon them. Typically, in these types of cultures, the project manager's role is perceived to be that of doer. The business analyst will fall into their natural state of doing and will analyse the project, formulate business requirements, functional requirements and technical requirements and many other tasks formulated in the plan. The only problem with this is that all the project management functions are neglected in the completion of their usual duties. The project manager's role is to do exactly that, MANAGE. This means to lead, co-ordinate, facilitate, influence, monitor, control, negotiate, resolve conflict, plan etc. None of these words actually have anything to do with completing tasks that make up the completion of the project. A project manager should not write code, lay foundations of buildings, write the copy for the advertising campaign etc they should manage the completion of these tasks (and a lot more).

In this accidental project manager environment, the ability for the project manager to stand up to key stakeholders moving the goal posts and to report accurately project progress to the sponsor and customers is reduced to negligible or nil. Hence, no matter how hard the project manager works on the tasks they have allocated themselves (eg: the code, foundations, copyright etc), they will never successfully complete the project (ie: on time, within budget AND to the quality needed for benefits to accrue). Whether you call this accidental project manager a wimp because they failed to lead while doing the work themselves, or whether you just say they were set up to fail is really immaterial as the end result either way is another unsuccessful project. So, the main missing ingredient from the accidental project manager is their ability to lead the project team, its stakeholders and other people within the environment that the project takes place. The reason they can't lead is because they have too many other duties to perform and hence, even if they were strong leaders, don't have the time to be one.

Do companies with some form project management maturity actually fair any better. Unfortunately the answer is no. Our experience is that even in companies that consider their project management maturity to be high, the project managers are still defaulting to sponsors and stakeholders when tough decisions are needed. The result is usually a project that delivers little and the blame then hurled back to the project manager for not delivering. As Neal Whitten wrote in his June 02 article "Don't expect management to understand project management as well as project managers. Everyone is looking for the project manager to take charge."

This leadership role applies to a range of people including team members (both internal and external), internal and external stakeholders, project sponsors and ancillary people throughout the organisation as a whole. To lead effectively, the project manager must be able to manage all the functions in the PMBoK (Scope, Time, Cost, Quality, Risk, Communications, Procurement, Change and Integrate all of these functions). But their ability to do these 8 functions well and integrate them well is nothing in comparison to their ability to lead and influence others. The 9 functions of project management, when done well, give the project manager the knowledge to make tough decisions (and therefore show a bit of backbone). However, it doesn't matter how well they manage these 9 functions, if they fail to inspire and convince the projects stakeholders of the need for the project and the benefits it will bring, then the project will still fail miserably.

MBH will be testing in an upcoming study the assertion we made earlier that most project managers fail to deliver successful projects because of their failure to lead. Our reasons for this assertion will also be tested. These reasons are that project managers are given an abundance of tools to help manage the 9 functions of project management but are not given any practical knowledge on how to lead. There is considerable confusion on what their true role is and few understand the importance of the projects they deliver in the overall achievement of the strategic goals set by the business. One of the biggest reasons for this confusion and lack of understanding is due to the complete absence of benefits management in the PMBoK and to a lesser extent other methodologies. It is only when a project manager understands the benefits of the project and uses the business case for the project as much as the Scope of Work that they can then explain why a decision not to change the scope, or to

change the scope is made. Project managers must learn the art of explaining the benefits of the business case in a variety of ways depending on the stakeholder to whom they are trying to influence.

We will complete our study and submit findings in our January newsletter. Make sure you tell all your colleagues as we look to prove the missing ingredients of a project manager's toolkit.