

Applying Project Management in our Everyday Life

For some, project management is a work methodology. For me, it is a way of thinking and a pragmatic method of application in life. A project is a set of activities bound to a timeline, with specific cost, with the objective to deliver a unique solution. A project manager is usually assigned to run a project, manage the activities, keep the cost spending within budget and ensure the delivery of the objective. The pillars of project management are obvious in the definition: Time, budget, and scope.

Any activity that is time-bound can be dealt with as a project, irrespective of how big or small it is. A wedding, opening a small shop in a village, renovating an old garage or a dumped caravan are all projects. They all require planning, they are limited in time, have cost and have a deliverable or objective. So, if we consider some of our daily personal activities as projects, we can apply fundamentals of project management to enable us to measure success in our life, provide personal satisfaction and make us better planners and happier human beings. Throughout this paper, I will talk about a common activity that can be considered as a project, from our real life experience, which is a trip. This can be either a family trip or a trip with friends abroad. I will take the 1st part which is family trip.

To apply project management in our real life projects, it's important to apply its fundamentals, which are referred to as Project Management Knowledge areas. These include: scope management, time management, cost management, quality management, Human Resource Management, Communications management, Risk management, Procurement management and Integration management. Of course, not all the 9 knowledge areas apply to all the personal projects in our daily life. But it's important to understand them, and understand their pragmatic application, and afterwards, we can choose which area to apply and at which stage. I will explain how these knowledge areas apply to the family trip example and try to put them in real life context.

How many times we get engaged in doing things that don't concern us? A proper scope management gives a person better control of his/her life. The scope of the family trip includes determining the location of the trip, the time of travel, and what's required to make this trip. There's a commitment to the family usually, so it's important to not let external factors interfere with the trip (or the project). The external factors include extra work at the office prior to the trip or a new proposed location by one of the children. Keeping focus is key to achieve the end result with minimal disruptions.

In a controlled working environment, interferences are managed to a certain extent. But in real life, everyone of us is constantly and continuously distracted, either by a person (family, friends, salespeople) or events (accident, ceremony, elections). Keeping track of time is important to keep a person focused, and hence control the time spent on these activities. Prioritizing projects will help in assigning time to them. In the trip project, it's important to decide when to start planning for the trip, when to purchase the tickets and book the accommodation, and when to

do the trip itself. Time constraints here include the work vacations, school vacations and travel season at the country you're visiting. Purchasing late tickets may be expensive, and in some cases it will have a risk of losing the trip project all together.

Cost is what people usually think of the most. But when it is not properly managed, a person may end up overspending in useless events, and under-spending in other more important ones. Having an general idea of the budget, or even a detailed formal plan, is a good aid in controlling the money we spend. Frequent assessment of the costs to date versus the planned costs will help put things back in track, and help us in making a decision on what we're doing. The direct costs of the trip are the ticket, accommodation, transportation and daily allowance. Having a clear budget from the beginning helps keeping track of the cost. It's useful to add some contingency money, which will minimize the discomfort when the trip cost goes above budget.

Everything we do is done to a certain quality standards. It is easy to compromise quality once the other areas are poorly managed. We may plan for a wedding for months, but it ends up in a bad quality. The tricky thing about quality is that it's not so obvious during the process of work, but when the work is finished (successfully or not). The expected quality of the trip should be agreed with the family from the beginning. The luxury expectation of the transportation and the accommodation should be properly managed, and therefore quality measures should be put in place throughout the project. For example, checking hotel ratings or asking for feedback helps in expecting the quality.

Human Resources is a corporate term. In real life, these are the people we deal with, the people who work with us or for us. It usually happens that a construction project manager can manage a Million dollar project, but fail to have a room in his house painted on time. The way to control this is by controlling those who work for us. When it comes to having employees, it doesn't matter if they are on you payroll for a lifetime, or a month. You pay them, and hence you should control part of their life, when they work for you! The human resources in the trip are mainly the family, who should be properly managed. They may sometimes cause trouble and hence a mix of managerial/parental skills should be applied, to keep them happy and cooperating in the trip success.

Communication management is crucial to control people and manage their interference in a person's life. Knowing who should be involved, and at what stage is key to providing peace of mind and more focus. For example, sometimes prior to the trip the in-laws or the neighbors have to be notified to look after the house. Moreover, probably the boss at work, or the kids' teachers need to know the trip schedule and the potential delays. Making a list of the people who should be involved is important.

Risk management is almost always thought of, but risk mitigation is usually missed. A list of risks and the ways to mitigate them can drastically help in controlling risks, and make a person better prepared for the uncertainties. In a trip, uncertainties may be a family emergency, or a change

in the political or natural conditions of the trip destination. Contingency plans should be in place and should be implemented if the risk became a reality.

Procurement management involves contracts that are legal binding documents between the seller and the buyer. Procurement management is responsible for providing the needed equipment or products on the right time, and right amount. Time of procurement and cost of purchases is very important here. In the trip, important contracts have to be properly documented, to be used when needed. These include the tickets and reservations, and also receipts of purchased goods, which can be used in some countries to claim back tax deductions. Since the trip is relatively a small project, procurement management can be joined with another project management knowledge area, such as cost management for example.

Integration management is the management of the 8 fundamentals which are already mentioned. A good balance of these 8 knowledge areas will keep a positive progress of the project. Poor integration usually leads to either getting our life messed up by too many activities, or by having our pocket short of money, or our day too short to accomplish what we have to do, or poor quality in what we do, or clash with others. We can have all of these together if things got so bad. The integration management of the trip is done by seeing the links between the different knowledge areas, and managing the quality, time and cost effectively and efficiently.

In conclusion, applying project management fundamentals is all about control. If you control your life, you will be a happier person. Project Management fundamentals are not to be applied only at work, but can also be taken back home with us. A trip for the whole family can sometimes be complicated, but if properly managed, and dealt with as a project, it can be done. Trips are bonding projects, and I recommend that families do them more often.

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References:

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