treatise

Optimization of private and professional work

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Foreword

First, let me give you some information about my personal and professional background. In over 40 years of professional experience, I have worked as CEO and branch manager for various companies. These companies, as consultants, focused on optimizing production workflows within industrial companies and on project management for similar projects. During this time, I primarily worked for the aviation, weapons, and furniture industries in Europe (Germany, Italy, Switzerland) and abroad (USA, South Africa). In my spare time, I taught production optimization as a guest lecturer at several German technical universities and project management for various North German chambers of commerce.

Today, I'm retired, and with this essay, I intend to pass on the knowledge I've gained during my professional life to others. I would like to emphasize that, firstly, I don't intend to create yet another textbook, and that the insights and approaches presented here should be understood as one possible   solution   among   others.

Perhaps you can use some of my experiences
to make decisions and complete tasks more successfully.

Günter Becker

1 What is it about?

Whether in our private lives or at work, it's usually about completing tasks successfully. Task goals are usually predetermined or self-imposed, and their implementation takes place while taking into account the ever-present limitations of opportunities and resources.

The content of this definition corresponds exactly to the content generally applicable to so-called projects. One could therefore say that tasks in the private sphere can often be considered projects.

This also applies to the success and problem points for the success or failure of the tasks/projects.

2 Implementation problems and successes

Over the years of my professional work up to the present day, my discussions with decision-makers and employees of companies and findings from numerous studies by economic institutes and universities have led to the conclusion that more than 75% of all (optimization or IT) projects worldwide do not achieve the success that the clients imagined or desired.

The following factors are repeatedly mentioned, which lead to success or failure depending on their severity:

- Consistent adherence to the principles of success.
- The social/human component.

Likewise, everyone has probably had the experience of making the wrong decision or simply forgetting something in their private life (for example, their swimming trunks on summer vacation).

2.1 Principles

A key factor in the successful implementation of tasks/projects is their preparation. It is important to keep in mind known principles and, above all, to adhere to them consistently. This required/necessary consistent adherence is precisely the core problem with poor preparation.

It does not matter why a principle is deviated from, because the logical consequence is always a worse result.

Key known principles:

- A task objective should be clearly described, measurable in terms of success and achievable on the basis of the available options.
- New or changed tasks always have positive or negative consequences.
- From the perspective of successful work, every person can only accomplish a certain amount of work within a set working time. Overwork inevitably leads to poorer work quality.
- Successful work usually requires the necessary implementation skills.

2.2 Social/human component.

In today's private and professional lives, most tasks are impossible without the collaboration of several people. Teamwork is the magic word here.

Please note:

Every person has their own unique social behaviors and skills, the origins of which [1]lie in their own personal life experiences and their egoistic goals.

This sounds quite simple and understandable at first, but in practice it is given far too little attention.

Here are some examples:

- There is the superior who wants to impose his will by virtue of his office, even though he lacks a detailed understanding and acceptance of the work required to achieve it.
- There is the employee who wants to be the actual boss but is hardly willing to accept the associated consequences (responsibility, stress, overtime, etc.).
- There is the person who realizes that the task is actually much too big for him because he lacks the competence for it or he wishes for a more comfortable job, but does not want to admit this.
- There is a misconception that teamwork means that everyone in the team is equal.

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[1]This is about healthy egoism, according to the motto live and let live.

- There are those who are overly helpful and take work off the hands of their friends or colleagues because they cannot cope with it and then find that their own work suffers as a result.

3 Solutions

Many roads lead to Rome. Below, I would like to present some concrete solutions that I have used in my professional practice to lead tasks/projects to success or to get poorly managed projects back on track for success.

3.1 I'm not everyone's friend!

The motto in the title of this section in no way means that I'm not respectful and helpful! It does mean, however, that I'm not one of those people who say yes to everything just to avoid potential conflict.

Whenever I disagree, I run the risk of conflict with someone. This conflict, among other things, leads to my personal advantages or disadvantages. Therefore, it is entirely my decision how far I am willing to go and accept the advantages or disadvantages.

Has it ever happened to you that you initially gave in on something or an opinion and then in the end you were the "stupid one" who was held responsible for it?

Preparing and realizing success means:

- Having a clear, competent opinion on a matter. Advocating for it to superiors and staying consistent even in the face of opposition.
- When I realized that my opinion was wrong, I openly admitted it and corrected it.
- If I am going to do someone else's work, either in whole or in part, I make it clear to them beforehand that I do not automatically assume responsibility for the success of their work!
- If I do not believe that I am suitable for a job, the task is too big for me or I believe that successful work is not possible, then I say no clearly and with clear reasons and refuse the task!
- No matter what happens and no matter who the other person is, I always treat them the way I would like to be treated: respectfully, tolerantly, and kindly. I also set appropriate limits for annoying, justified accusations if they are presented differently.

3.2 KAIZEN

Kaizen ... "change for the better,"... describes both a Japanese philosophy of life and work and a methodological concept centered on the pursuit of continuous and endless improvement.

Improvement occurs through the gradual, selective perfection or optimization of a product or process.[2]

The tasks/projects discussed here also belong to work processes to which KAIZEN can be applied. I have adapted the following KAIZEN content [1] to the topic discussed here in the following sections.

3.2.1 The 5S movements

The 5S principles primarily target workshop workplaces, where the workplace is understood as the place where the value-creating processes take place within the company. In our view, they focus on the task or project.

Seiri:

Create order. Clearly define goals and non-goals.

Seiton's

love of order. Define the task and describe the project's components.

Seiso

cleanliness. Keep your tasks/project documentation up to date.

Seiketsu:

Personal sense of order. Make 5S a habit by setting task/project standards!

Shitsuke

Discipline. Apply 5S consistently and exemplarily.

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[2]WIKIPEDIA

3.2.2 The 7M checklist

These are the seven most important factors (Ishikawa diagram) that must be checked again and again. For our task, the following can be used:

- **Human** . Social and knowledge. Competent task participants as well as their own social and knowledge skills are suited to the task/project.

- **Method** . My work is divided into: preparation, implementation, and success monitoring.

- **Milieu/environment** . My work team accepts me and I accept them.

- **Management** . Superiors/clients accept me, have identified and accepted task objectives and resulting consequences.

- **Measurability** . There are mutually understood and clear success goals.

3.2.3 The 7W checklist

The 7W checklist, as a rhetorical tool, may have originated with Cicero (7 W questions). I ask these questions when defining or evaluating task/project/work content.

- **What** should be done?
- **Who** does it?
- **Why** do you do it?
- **How** is it prepared?
- **When** is it done?
- **Where** should it be done?
- **Why** isn't it done differently?

3.3 The Three Mu

The three Mu form the basis for the loss philosophy of the Toyota Production System (TPS). Within the framework of this loss philosophy, the three Mu are seen as negative focal points of loss potential and are therefore to be avoided.

- **Muda** waste, see the seven Muda
- **Mura** deviations in the processes (also imbalance)
- **Muri** Overload of employees and machines

3.3.1 The Seven Muda

The seven types of waste (seven Muda) as typical sources of loss.

Waste itself (muda) is the obvious cause of losses. Specifically, seven types of waste are distinguished, which occur almost everywhere in a company.
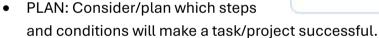
Here are the wastes that are most detrimental to task/project success.

- **Muda** through over-fulfillment of task/project goals.
- **Muda** by waiting for the next task/work step.
- **Muda** through performance of faulty work.
- **Muda** due to incorrect procedures that are not appropriate to the task or project.

3.4 PDCA

The **Deming Circle** , also known as the **Deming Wheel** , *Shewhart Cycle* , or *PDCA* **,** is an iterative three- or four-phase process for learning and improvement within an organization. *PDCA* stands for *Plan-Do-Check-Act* .

Applied to our topic, PDCA means.

- PLAN: Consider/plan which steps and conditions will make a task/project successful.
- DO: Implement the plan consistently.
- CHECK: Check the task/project success in relation to the agreed (!) goal.
- ACT: Adapt the plan and work to the situation, with the acceptance of all involved. Derive new goals if necessary.

3.5 Talk to each other properly

In contrast to what I experienced abroad, I still find a comparatively poor culture of conversation and discussion in Germany.

The main deficiencies are:

- Meeting invitations are either not sent at all or sent too late. They often contain only superficially formulated discussion objectives.
- Participants arrive significantly late and often expect that previously discussed information will be repeated.
- Participants do not bring the expected results of their homework and then want to complete it as part of the meeting.
- Participants make phone calls during the meeting or leave the room to make phone calls.
- No moderator will be appointed.
- There is a lack of appointing a scribe and timely delivery of minutes of the meeting.

If you are responsible for such a discussion as part of your duties/project implementation, then clearly and unequivocally reject these deficiencies. Discuss this with those responsible and make it clear to them that these deficiencies lead to a waste of (conversation) time and money and a poor outcome for the meeting. This is especially true for tasks/projects that have already gone wrong!

The same applies here: "I'm not everyone's darling."

- If someone starts talking on the phone, interrupt the meeting and wait until they are finished.
- If necessary homework isn't available, end the meeting early. Never complete it during the meeting as a substitute.
- Always appoint or request a moderator and note-taker.
- If this happens again, ask people who arrive late to stop attending the meeting.
- As a general rule, reject participants who do not follow these rules.

3.6 The "healthy" project

What I find incomprehensible is that tasks/projects are often carried out as follows:

- A deficient project order is issued.
- There is a lack of task-appropriate risk planning.
- The work steps are planned.
- Project responsibility is delegated to the project manager.

The following essential steps are missing for the task/project success:

- The description and agreement of objectives, measures and consequences is missing in whole or in part in the project contract.
- The work/project plan does not include a preparation phase. This is essential to ensure the availability of all necessary resources, including clarifying whether the environment is even prepared for the work/project given the current (company) tasks/work situation.
- Project responsibility does not rest on the shoulders of the project manager! Every client should be clear that this is their own responsibility. The project manager is only responsible for the task/project execution on their behalf. Therefore, the client's involvement, for example, through a steering committee, must be ensured in the project plan.

Make sure you don't make these mistakes or correct these deficiencies.