

## LESSON THREE: STARTING A PROJECT

Welcome to lesson 3 of your Professional Development Project Management course

### STARTING A PROJECT

The startup process for a project is extremely important. Often when a project starts, the project manager is very keen to get the production started, to get the execution of the project started because they're very conscious of the deadline that exists for the project and they want to get to work as quickly as they can. Therefore, the project's start up process is often neglected, or at best underdone and not enough work is done to get the project started.

### IN THIS LESSON

So in this lesson, we're going to look at the importance of the startup process and we're going to talk about the issues that are involved in insuring that stakeholders properly participate in the project itself. There are a number of different aspects of this that we're going to look at. We're going to look at the agreement on the problem itself, what we need to do to help us to do that. We're going to look at ensuring that their right level of commitment exists for the resources that you need to complete the project. Often, projects fail to achieve their objectives because there aren't sufficient resources, or the commitment to the resources, isn't as strong as it needs to be. We're going to look at clarify expectations and we're going to run through some practical steps to start a project that you can use in your project management activity. We'll talk about the different responsibilities that the project manager has, and finally I'll summarize this lecture.

### WHY IS PROJECT INITIATION IMPORTANT?

So we've talked about the importance of the project initiation process. What we're doing here is that we're saying that the stakeholders need to be properly involved and participating in the project. A project can have many different stakeholders. For example, a construction project will have the people who are participating in the construction itself, there may be some contractors, there may be services which are required to make the project successful, but there will also be other people. There will be senior management in the organization's concern who has the power to allocate resources and people to the project and to ensure that support is maintained as the project proceeds. There will also be other stakeholders particularly in the construction project. If a road is being built, there may be people whose houses are affected by that, whose lifestyle's going to be affected by that, so they're going to need to participate in the project too. They have the potential to severely limit the success, if not cause failure altogether, of the project itself.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE START PROCESS

So, the importance of the start process is around understanding who the stakeholders are and what they can do to influence the project. We need to understand how they see the project, these people who are living in these houses near where a new road is being constructed; do they positively view the project? Or do they have concerns that are going to be needed to be taken

into account as the project proceeds? There will also be people who have the capacity to provide resources for the project. Typically senior management, but in the construction project, there may also be government stakeholders who are allocating all or some of the money needed for the project itself. We need to understand what the issues are in the willingness to provide those resources. They're certainly going to need a degree of accountability for how the resources are going to be used. Finally, we need to understand how the different stakeholders view what the results of the project are going to be. Do they understand properly what it is that the project is intended to do, and are they on board with that, do they support that?

The problem we have here is that there is the potential for catastrophic misunderstanding, for people not understand what it is that the project is intended to do, what money and resources are going to be needed for it. As the project proceeds, these arise as issues. It's clearly important that these are resolved not half way through the project when the implications and costs associated with dealing with them can often be very large and also often prevent the project from proceeding and being completed. It's important that these things are clarified through a systematic process at the start of the project.

## STAKEHOLDERS

The project's stakeholders are very important people. In many organizations, one person may want a project but they might not be the only person affected by it. The manager of the production area, the leader of a project team, may be people who want this activity to be carried out. But in managing a project, it's important that you understand all of the people who are going to be affected by the project and that they participate in the project process so that there is effective communication with them and that you either overcome or neutralize any objections that they might have. They may have a negative or a positive influence on the project. There may be people who if properly involved, may be able to contribute significantly to make the project successful. They may have knowledge or skills that are going to be helpful. They can also have a negative influence if the people who are living in the area (that the road is potentially going through) don't want that road to be there. They can do all sorts of things to inhibit that. Such as in an extreme case, physically stand in the way of the construction process and we've seen that in different parts of the world.

To find the stakeholders, the way that we do this is to talk to people who are involved in the project. That will enable you to find the stakeholders. Asking the question, who do you think is going to be affected by this? So talking to be people is very important. There are also analytical techniques which can help you to do this. We're not going to go into great detail in them here, but basically, it is a systematized process of identifying the people who are likely to be affected and be able to influence the project itself.

## AGREEING ON THE PROBLEM

As part of the process of involving stakeholders, it's very important that there should be an agreement on why the project itself is being conducted. Different people all have different view

on what the problem actually is that the project is intended to tackle. People come to things with different points of views and with different interests. It's important that the project manager has a good understanding of what those different views are and is able to, through the consultation and the startup process of the project, to ensure that everyone, all of the stakeholders, have a common view of what the project is intended to do. That requires discussions, sometimes extensive. There are also facilitations techniques that will help you to do that, that have been developed over many years of work inside projects which enable you to learn the different views of people. Brainstorming is a very simple technique that can be used for this, but there are also more detailed facilitation techniques that can help you to do it. Techniques that will help you talk to the people who are the stakeholders and draw from them, their views around the project. What we're aiming to do with this, is to agree on what the problem is that the project is intended to solve.

## RESOURCE COMMITMENT

The resources involved in the project are one of the most important parts of it. If the resources don't exist, a project will not be able to be completed successfully. Every project has a level of resources that needs to be successful. Those resources may come from a combination of people, it may come budget-wise from the senior management of an organization, and they're often the ones providing the money. Different departments in an organization may provide expertise and people that will enable the project to be successful. The level of commitment that they have to that is going to determine the project's success, what will determine that will be the sense of importance that they have of the project itself. Is this a project that really matters to them? So part of the process of starting a project will be to build that support, talk to the people who you depend on for the resources that you need to complete a project, and ensure that they have the right level of commitment and that that's going to continue throughout the project implementation.

## CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

As part of this process of stakeholder consultation, we need to clarify people's expectations of what the project is actually going to do. We need to clearly define what the project outcomes are going to be. Often this is called scope definition and we develop a scope definition document which very explicitly in detail, says exactly what we're trying to achieve in the project, what we expect will exist at the end of the project process. This can be affected by the different desires that stakeholders have. Some will have a stronger interest in one element of the project than another and want more resources and more emphasis to be placed in that area. So resolving these issues in creating a common agreement, on what the project is going to do, is very important. The project manager might not always have the power to be able to do that. There will be people who the project manager doesn't have the ability to give instructions to, and so senior management in an organization may need to intervene to help this to happen. It may not be possible to get the agreement that we're seeking to get on the expectations from the project and less instructions are made by the people with the authority to do that, typically a senior

management level inside an organization. Many projects have encountered difficulties because the project manager didn't have that authority and there wasn't the agreement on what the project was intended to do.

## **STEPS TO START A PROJECT**

If you take a look at the reading for this lesson of the course, there is a very clear process there for the involvement of stakeholders that you can use. This isn't the only process that is used in involving stakeholders and starting a project, but the steps that you have here are very simple techniques that you can follow and a good place to start in your management of projects. So steps are first of all identifying the project's sponsor and that is the person who has the control over the resources that are needed to be able to make the project work effectively. This may be a vice president in an organization likely someone at a senior level whose able to actively communicate with other members of the senior management team if difficulties exist inside the project itself. The next stage, having done that, is to identify the key stakeholders. To find the people who have the interest and have the ability to either make the project a success or a failure.

The article then recommends that you prepare questionnaire and we have some details of that here and you can read about it inside the reading. But as a basis for the consultation with stakeholders, it lists the questions that you should ask when you're going through the process of involving stakeholders. Identify their interests, their level of commitment or opposition to the project and allow you to act on that. Once the questionnaire's prepared, we conduct interviews with the stakeholders and then we identify and resolve problems that arise from that. We find the conflicts on the expectations from the project, we find any weaknesses there are and the commitment of resources, and we act at this stage to resolve them. Trying to resolve these things further down the road in the project, is fought with difficulty and is often the reason for project failure.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Responsibilities inside the project need to be sorted out at the start of the project. We need to know who's going to do what inside the project and those responsibilities need to be made very clear. The person who's responsible for this is the project manager. They're the one who can control the progress of the project and therefore they need to be the one who need to allocate the responsibilities. If they have difficulty doing that, as in the example where a department inside the organization is not cooperating with the provision of resources, they then need to go to the project's sponsor. It's the project sponsor's job to resolve issues that arise in support for the project inside an organization. What we're doing here is creating a successful project. We're clarifying the responsibilities and creating the authority in the project manager to be able to successfully carry out the project.