ISSIG Bits



June 2010

For the latest information in Information Systems and Technology Project Management, visit http://www.pmi-issig.org/. The Information Systems SIG (ISSIG) dedicates itself to promoting the value of project management in Information Systems and Technology. It serves as a forum for communicating project management knowledge, principles, and practices by bringing practical solutions to our members and the industry worldwide.

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I. Information Systems SIG Milestones

Our Mission

The mission of the PMI Information Systems SIG is to become *the* professional IS and IT project management organization of choice by providing the greatest value to current



and prospective worldwide members through the delivery of quality and unique services and products in a cost-effective manner. The Mission will be accomplished through:

- Disseminating state-of-the-art project management practices.
- Member education.
- Members sharing and exchanging information.
- Championing professionalism of IS and IT project management.
- Serving as a networking and collaborative hub for all industries and all project management practitioner levels by supporting corporations, government agencies, academic institutions, subject matter experts, trainers, consultants, vendors, other components of PMI and other organizations that contribute to the profession of project management.

Looking for PDUs?

Many of our members earn Professional Development Units (PDUs) through the ISSIG to maintain their PMP certifications. From our Web site, click on Learn, Webinars or Podcasts to access a wealth of information and start earning those PDUs!





II. Greetings from the Chair



By Sanjay Swarup, PMP PMI-ISSIG Chair chair@pmi-issig.org

Dear PMI-ISSIG Members:

The project leadership and organization maturity are key to the success of the IS/IT projects. Presence of both plays an important role in making any project a success. Conversely, absence of both can make it extremely difficult for any project to succeed. Project leadership ensures that the project stays within the committed parameters. A good project leader will make sure that the project is delivered within the scope, on time, on budget and expected quality. Under professional leadership, the communications will be regular, risks will be mitigated with least impact and issues will be addressed speedily. The planning and execution phases will occur in the right sequences under a good leadership. The stakeholder satisfactions are high when project keep meeting its key commitments.

The organization maturity adds to the success of the projects. The project reports and documentation are of high quality. The estimates have sound footing and organization and external issues are addressed quickly. There is lesser stress on the project team in delivering a project when the project organization provides necessary support to the projects. Dealing with the stakeholders become easier when the project organization has a good relationship with the client organization. There is a perfect balance in sharing of the activities when both the professional leadership and matured organization are in place. Chances of failures are greatly reduced with both being present.

PMI and its components provide good professional developmental opportunities to its members through networking, communications and certifications. Members can share their challenges with other members and benefit from the experiences of their peers. Mentoring programs run by several PMI components provide great learning opportunities. PMI-ISSIG provides learning opportunities through

their popular webinars. Members can take advantage of the archived webinars and benefit from the PDUs, at no additional cost.

Throughout this year, I have been communicating directly with you through the Chair's messages on the PMI-ISSIG website and our monthly newsletter IS BITS. Some of you have been responding and asking questions. This two way communications make us feel good and assure us that we are on the right track. As valued members of PMI-ISSIG, you will continue to be our key stakeholders.

Through a series of my direct communications to you, I have been sharing information on the virtual communities program of PMI, as well. At the PMI-ISSIG we want to make sure that not only we preserve all our products and member services in the current form but you also benefit from the programs that were not part of our services. Throughout our discussions with PMI, the interest of all the PMI-ISSIG members is supreme and the effort is on to maximise the member benefits. We have approached this initiative with caution, always acting in upholding of our "Members First" theme.

PMI-ISSIG members are our strengths. The current board is here to serve you with complete honesty as dedicated volunteer leaders. You will always come first. Remember, our slogan this year is very simple – 'Members First'.

With best regards.

Sanjay Swarup, PMP, P.Eng. Chair, PMI-ISSIG chair@pmi-issig.org http://www.pmi-issig.org

2010 PMI-ISSIG Theme: "Members First"





III. From the Editor



By Tolitha Lewis, PMP

PMI-ISSIG Director of Communications

communications@pmiissig.org

Welcome to your June 2010 issue of the Bits!

We are able to provide this information thanks to the many volunteers within our group. Thanks to everyone who helps contribute to all of the efforts of the PMIISSIG community.

We love to include information written by our members! It's a great way to share your experience and provide critical value to the entire PMI-ISSIG

community. PDUs are awarded to authors as follows:

- ISSIG Review articles selected for publication earn 15 PDUs!
- Bits articles allow you the opportunity to be read by our thousands of members; however, they do not qualify for PDUs.

We urge you to document your expertise and send us an article to share in the Bits and/or Reviews. All articles should be in an MS Word format and can be submitted to communications@pmi-issig.org.

Remember that you can read past issues of the Bits and ISSIG Review on our Web site under Documents. Visit our Web site at www.pmi-issig.org You will be glad you did.

IV. Articles and Contributions



Tips for Managing a Virtual Team By Brian R. King brianking@mill3-king.com

Note: This article appeared in the PMI Community Post

All teams are built on the foundation of trust and understanding. This foundation allows a strong commitment to shared goals. As human beings we are social by nature, and we develop trust by our experiences and interactions with each other.

That effective communication is the key with virtual project teams as well. For virtual teams, though, the main and sometimes only means of communication is electronic. Although electronic communications are useful for instant messaging and exchanging design documents and files, they can also sacrifice the interpersonal relationships that are such a vital part of any project.

After all, if we do not know anything about an individual, we are less likely to trust and work with him or her effectively. The best method to gain understanding of each other is by having face-to-face meeting and interactions at the commencement of a project, although budgets may not permit this to occur.

Regardless, there are still techniques you can use to help overcome distance barriers. Many of these can be applied to normal team situations, but they are even more crucial when working in a virtual environment:

- Vary your communication methods. It is imperative that virtual team members communicate by phone and teleconferencing and not solely on the written method, whether by e-mail or text messages. Communicating by voice allows the sender and receiver to improve understanding by asking questions and resolving any potential misunderstandings.
- Define standard terminology and processes. Standardization eliminates confusion. It assists the project team in communicating on a common level to develop a standard and uniform approach.





This is especially important when teams aren't routinely meeting face-to-face.

- Develop and commit to an operating agreement that establishes ground rules for project team etiquette, which includes sensitivity to cultural differences, how the team will work together, expectations between members and accountability. This will help build that necessary team trust, even if you are hundreds of miles apart.
- Ensure careful attention to listening, and encourage all members of the team to participate fully. Team members have a responsibility to present their own thoughts and ideas as clearly as possible, regardless of distance. Again, this helps build trust and collaboration.
- Verify team members' understanding of the message and expectations for action. At the end of meeting, review all actions to be taken and expectations of deliverables. After all, at a distance, it can be tougher to make sure everybody is on the same page.
- Provide feedback that focuses on conveying positive and constructive intent. Make a conscientious effort to provide regular feedback on an ongoing basis, as the normal interactions of meeting and seeing each other on a regular basis is not possible. This feedback will allow relationship-building and reduce anxiety among the members.

As a leader and project manager responsible for a virtual team, you must take the time to ensure that the team members are not just sending out information, but are practicing active listening to ensure understanding.



Project Networking

By Nick Andrews and Karl
Boone

www.projectsatwork.com

Note: This article appeared in Projects@Work dated June 10th

Social networking is becoming a powerful tool for savvy project managers, and leveraging social networking platforms can pay big dividends for your global project teams. Here are some considerations before adopting a social networking tool for your project, as well as an overview of some effective options to explore.

Driven by the demands of globalized business, many projects today are growing in complexity with project managers often being asked to do more with less. The ability for project managers to successfully navigate this challenging environment is made increasingly difficult by the global, disparate nature of many project teams. Successful project managers recognize these challenges and have begun to leverage social networking to improve the outcomes of their projects. They recognize that there is value in both internal and external social networks to help bring virtual teams closer together and quickly tap into subject matter expertise in a fast, cost effective way.

There are several key challenges that social networking can address. How you ever found yourself on a project team where you needed quick subject matter expertise, but you didn't know where to look or have the resources to seek it out? Have you found project communications difficult when interfacing with global teams across multiple time zones? Many project managers become so entrenched in the day to day management of a project that they don't have time to consider some of the simple tools easily available to help them in these two key areas.

Social networking, in various forms and flavors is becoming one of the most effective channels to seek out and incorporate subject matter expertise into project outputs. Further, these new tools are also helping global teams address the challenge of finding ways to effectively communicate through different time zones.

What should a project manager consider when reviewing the potential of social networking tools? In considering the use of any social networking tool for your project, security should be top of mind. It's important to agree the level of privacy that the project sponsor requires before leveraging any tool. Social networking has created a new, wild frontier in terms of security issues, and it is very easy to accidentally post confidential information or intellectual property online.





Many project managers have successfully mitigated these risks by implementing an agreed set of data security principles during the project-planning phase. One of the best practices we have seen is a "security contract" that the project sponsor reviews and each member of the project team agrees and signs. This contract outlines the rules of engagement for posting information, transferring data to portable media, as well as other data security issues, and can go a long way to ensuring control over the flow of sensitive information across various platforms.

Another key step in evaluating social networking tools and their ability to help your project is to look at some of the best practices in the project management space and determine what tools are currently being leveraged by successful project managers. Below are some effective tools that are already being used extensively by teams in a global project environment:

Internal networks/Sector Interest Groups (SIGs)

– Several organizations have found that internal interest groups have provided a platform for project managers in disparate locations to share ideas. These "virtual" groups can provide quick, effective advice that incorporates ideas from a broad range of experts. This platform could begin as something as simple as a large email distribution list. As its effectiveness grows, some of these SIGs grow to have their own collaboration site, which acts as both a tracker of activity and a repository of some of the best ideas that have stemmed from these global discussions.

LinkedIn – Interest groups within LinkedIn can provide cost effective (often free!) high-quality subject matter expertise. There are several project management content groups that provide a platform for sharing ideas and best practices. Most members of these groups welcome the chance to share ideas on how to enhance their projects. Some of the largest of these groups are "Project Manager Networking Group" (100,000+ members); "Project Management Link" (50,000+ members)' and "PMI Credentialed PMP's" (30,000+ members).

Internal team blogs – A key challenge for a project manager with a global team in different time zones is to stay in touch and share information in an efficient manner. Internal blogs can provide a more interactive format than an email chain with the ability to attach audio & video files to help explain concepts

remotely and to keep easy tabs on related threads of discussion

Corporate wikis/corporate intranets – Corporate intranets have been in place for years now, but only recently have they begun to transform into interactive bulletin boards. These provide an aggregate view of company news, activities, and almost any other items that are important to the audience. Some of these bulletin boards incorporate corporate wikis and act as a repository of information instantly accessible to the entire company. Think of how valuable it would be if you were managing a project involving virtualization and you were able to find examples of prior similar projects executed by other teams in your company. This is how some of the best project manages are now using these "corporate social networks".

eRooms – An "eRoom" is another platform that has been in use for years by project teams within a select group of large companies (3Com, Cisco, Compaq, Pfizer, Siemens, etc). This technology enables remote teams to collaborate live in a virtual environment. The key features of eRooms are live chat, calendaring, and document management. There are a number of project collaboration shareware solutions and as social networking and cloud computing continue to proliferate, we foresee several hosted spinoffs offering similar eRoom technologies. This will provide project managers with several cost-effective options to set up remote "project rooms" for their teams.

Social networking is continuing to gain traction, as an increasing number of successful project managers are now including these platforms in their toolkits

The ability for social networking to aid in project execution can no longer be ignored. Some of the most successful project managers are finding ways to leverage these platforms in order to enhance the outcomes of their projects. The key to being successful with this strategy will ultimately hinge on choosing the right channels for the appropriate project needs.





Conflict Resolution By Rich Maltzman and Dave Shirley http://svprojectmanagement.co

<u>Note</u>: This article appeared in Silicon Valley Project Management Blog dated May 15th

In this entry we look at a project conflict resolution tool and relate it to a recent interesting but little-publicized news event which is *funny* in a way, but very, *very sad* in a much deeper way (excuse the pun).

The tool is the **Thomas-Kilmann** model, which sounds very fancy and hard to understand but is actually very straightforward, powerful, and applicable to your role as a project manager in understanding and dealing with conflict. And you know that as a PM you **will** deal with conflict. Why? Here are three main reasons:

- Projects are by definition -new and unique, and invoke change. People are – by nature – adverse to change. This is fundamental.
- You will be managing the project "as if" you are a supervisor/manager of a team – without the commensurate title/level that has the team members actually reporting to you.
- You have team members again, by definition – from different disciplines that think and behave differently (think artist and engineer, software developer and installer).

You can already imagine that the conflict is multidimensional. Between you and another project or project manager. Between "silos" of departments or organization. Between team members on your project. Between team members on your projects and their managers. And on. And on and on.

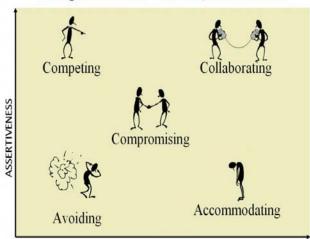
The Thomas-Kilmann model looks at the ways people deal with conflict in two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Note that assertiveness is not aggressiveness. Here it's a scale of how much you assert your will along a scale from 'not at all' to 'at all costs, assert my will'.

Similarly, cooperativeness is measured on a scale from 'not at all' to 'at all costs, cooperate'. A simple chart (see below) plots two these dimensions against each other and yields 5 ways of dealing with conflict. You can even take an assessment to determine where you and your team members fit in this model. In any case, no one way is better than the other. A project manager has several key takeaways from this:

- 1. Recognize that conflict will exist and that these aspects (assertiveness and cooperativeness) contribute
- 2. Recognize the type of conflict you have and when the various types of resolution work when you are an arbitrator
- 3. Same as above for those times when you are a party in a conflict.

Looking at the chart you can see that there will be times – times of urgency – where the PM will need the competing role and 'lay down the law' and direct the project team. Perhaps the more steady-state role of the PM is in the collaborative area – at least in assuring that this is the area in which your team is working.

Dealing With Conflict - Thomas/Kilmann model



COOPERATIVENESS





Relationship between Projects and Organizations

By Kailash Awati http://eight2late.wordpress.c om

Note: This article appeared in Eight2late dated May 20th

Introduction

Most of the research and practice literature on project management tends to view projects as being isolated from their environment. It is obvious to anyone who has worked on a project that this isn't so. In view of this, it is useful to look at the relationship between projects and the organizations that host them. This post looks at this issue, drawing on a paper by Gernot Grabher entitled, Cool Projects, Boring Institutions: Temporary Collaboration in Social Context.

The emergence of projects

Grabher begins his discussion with a sketch of the how projects emerged as a distinct work form.

Projects - i.e. time bound, goal focused activities – have always been around. The modern notion of a project, however, arose from a development philosophy that came out of the US Department of Defense in the 1950s. He states,

... Instead of fragmenting and pre-specifying the development of military technologies along functional disciplines, these technologies were described in relation to their objectives, i.e. the military parameters of these weapons. The pacing of these concentrated efforts was crucial: parameters had to be met, goals had to be accomplished according to a grand scheme (program?) to win the armament race. Development processes that earlier were seen as separate activities were now conceptualized as an integrated entity called a program, system or project. The overwhelming scale of these projects in terms of financial and scientific resources as well as their ambitious timing created formidable problems of coordination and control. Experiments with various forms of organizational

control ultimately lead to the professionalization of the role of the project manager...

From thereon the concepts of projects and project management were taken up (with much enthusiasm and optimism) by business and industry. The formalization of various project management methodologies, standards, qualifications and trade journals can be seen a culmination of this process.

Given the military-industrial origins of the profession, it is easy to see why a "command and control" philosophy dominates much of project management thought and practice. Many of the early projects that are paraded as textbook examples of successful projects operated outside normal organizational oversight. They were, to a large extent, deliberately shielded from external influences. I believe this is why isolation from the environment is seen as a Good Thing by project managers - problems of coordination and control become so much simpler when one does not have to manage relationships and politics that are (perceived as being) external to a project. This practice may be necessary and workable for classified projects that run on billion dollar budgets, but it doesn't work so well in environments that most project managers work in. Projects don't take place in a vacuum; they are born, live and die in real-world organizations. To forget that is to see the "tree of the project" and miss the "forest of the organization." This is particularly so because, unlike those near-mythical mega-projects of the 1950s, the efforts that you and I work on are deeply entwined with their hosting organizations.

Organization-related characteristics of projects Grabher then notes some characteristics of projects. I summarize these in the next few paragraphs.

First, it is interesting that the original meaning of the word "project" referred to a "proposal" or "idea", rather than a "directed, time-bound effort." Grabher points out that this shift in meaning was accompanied by a shift in focus: from project as idea (or goal) to project as process (or means to





achieving a goal). Projects are thus seen as *vehicles* for achieving organizational goals.

Second, Grabher notes that projects are often hard to decompose into constituent tasks, and that such a (commonly agreed) decomposition is only possible when stakeholders interrelate with each other continually. This underscores the importance of communication in projects.

Third, Grabher highlights the importance of the project manager (he uses the term contractor) as the "lynchpin on whom trust is focused." The role of the manager is particularly important in projects on which team members do not have the time to get to know each other well.

Fourth, the project manager / contractor is also the wielder of organizational authority as far as the project is concerned. He or she is, in this sense, a representative of the organization – a person whose presence underlines the fact that the project exists to achieve specified organizational goals.

Finally, deadlines are a defining aspect of projects. They serve several functions. For example, they ensure that a sense of urgency for action and progress remains through the duration of the project. They also might serve to legitimize execution of project work without external interference (this argument was frequently used in the military-industrial projects of the 1950s). But above all, the final deadline, which culminates in the termination of the project, also serves as a connector to the rest of the organization. It is a time in which handoffs, documentation, team disbanding etc. occurs, thus enabling the results and experiences from the project disperse into the wider organization.

Projects in organizations.

The characteristics noted above highlight the dual nature of projects: on the one hand, as noted earlier, projects are seen as semi-autonomous temporary organizations, but on the other they are also firmly embedded within the hosting organization. An effect of the latter is particularly evident in consulting and

software services firms (or even corporate IT shops), which tend to do similar projects over and over. As Grabher notes,

[projects] apparently operate in a milieu of recurrent collaboration that, after several project cycles, fills a pool of resources and gels into latent networks. Project organizing is mostly directed towards the actual realization of a potential that is generated and reproduced by the practice of drawing on core members of (successful) prior projects to serve on derivative successor projects. Such chains of repeated co-operation are held together (or cut off) by the reputation members gain (or lose) in previous collaborations...

Another aspect of embedded-ness is the co-location of team members within a larger organizational milieu. The standard benefits of co-location are well known. These are:

- Savings of transactional costs such as those incurred in communication, supervision of staff at remote locations etc. See my post on a transaction cost view of outsourcing for more on this.
- Co-location improves the efficacy of communication by encouraging face-to-face interactions.
- 3. It enables "near real-time" monitoring of the health of the project and its environment.

There's more though. Grabher notes that in addition to the above "intentional" or "strategic" benefits, colocation also ensures that team members are exposed to the same organizational noise — which consists of a "concoction of rumours, impressions, recommendations, trade folklore and strategic misinformation (falsehoods!)." Co-location enables project teams to make collective sense of organizational noise — this shared understanding of the environment can contribute significantly to the creation of a team spirit.

A related notion is that of *enculturation*: that is, the process of becoming an accepted member of the group, or an insider. This has less to do with





expertise and knowledge than learning the unspoken rules and norms of a community. Although becoming a member of a community has much to do with social interactions within the workplace, there is more: a lot of essential knowhow and know-what is transferred through informal interactions between senior members of the team (who are often senior members of the organization) and others.

Projects generally need to draw upon a range of organizational resources: people and physical infrastructure being the most obvious ones. Grabher notes that the increasing projectization of organizations can be attributed to a perception that project-based management is an efficient way to allocate productive resources in a flexible manner (...whether this perception is correct, is another matter altogether). However, there are other less obvious influences that organizations exert too. For example, Grabher points out that organizational norms and rules provide the basis for the emergence of swift trust, which is trust based on roles and professional ability rather than individuals and personalities. Further, at a higher level, organizational culture plays a role in determining how a project is governed, managed and run. These explicit and implicit norms have a stabilizing influence on projects.

In addition to the stabilizing influence of the hosting organization, projects also offer opportunities to build and enhance links between organizations – for instance, strategic partnerships. This is, in effect, institution building aimed at leveraging the strengths of the participating organizations for a greater joint benefit. In such situations the participating organizations take on the role of "lynchpins" on whom trust is focused.

Grabher makes the point that firms (and institutions comprised of firms) not only provide resources that make projects possible, but also host a range of processes that are needed to organize and run projects. For one, projects are usually preceded by several organizational processes involving

deliberation, selection and preparation. These activities have to occur for a project to happen, but they normally fall outside the purview of the project.

A somewhat paradoxical aspect of projects is although they offer the opportunity for enhancing organizational knowledge, this rarely happens in practice. The high pressure environment in projects leaves little time for formal training or informal learning, or even to capture knowledge in documents. To a large extent the hosting organizations are to blame: Grabher suggests that this paradox is a consequence of the lack of organizational redundancy in project-based organizing.

I'll end this section with the observation that the social dimension of projects is often neglected. Projects are often hindered by organizational politics and inertia. Further, a large number of projects fail because of varying perceptions of project goals and the rationale behind them. Although it seems obvious that a project should not proceed unless all stakeholders have a shared understanding of objectives and the reasons for them, it is surprising how many projects drift along without it. Many project planners neglect this issue, and it invariably comes back to bite them.

Conclusions

In the conclusion to the paper, Grabher states: The formation and operation of projects essentially relies on a societal infrastructure which is built on and around networks, localities, institutions and firms. Relations between temporary and permanent systems are not a matter of straightforward substitution but have to be regarded in terms of interdependence. 'Cool' projects, indeed, rely on 'boring' institutions...

This is unarguable, but it should also be kept in mind that projects are often subject to negative organizational influences which can slow them down, or even kill them altogether (which is perhaps why those early defence projects were set up as near-autonomous initiatives).



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Mailing Address:

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e-Mail: info@pmi-issig.org Web site: www.pmi-issig.org

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