Max Shi

BT 353C Final Reflection

12/7/18

I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System

Compiled Reflections:

**8/28**

This week, we were introduced to the basics of the project, and the professional environment we live in as a context to the projects that we will take on. The two biggest takeaways from these first two classes are that projects are split into multiple steps, with the first and last, Initiating and Closing, being the two most important, yet the two most neglected steps for a successful project. The second takeaway is 60% of projects, by various factors, do not meet the original specifications that the project originally set out to accomplish. While this does not mean that those 60% of projects are failures in themselves, it still goes to show the obvious necessity in good project management.

Something that really resonated with me, and something for me to keep in mind during my professional career, is the kind of workplace we will be living in. The idea that over our lives, we will work for 8-10 companies, be self-employed, and work overseas is especially important when looking at the bigger picture in the future. Furthermore, the idea that productivity peaks out relatively early in a career stint was surprising, especially with the idea that people start thinking about a different job two years into a new one.

**9/4**

This week we defined and fleshed out how projects succeed and fail, and to what degree they succeed and fail. These two concepts are very different in the context of project management in comparison to the general definitions of success and failure, one of the biggest surprises to me was how big a failure the Sydney Opera House was from a project management perspective, while no one outside of project management would call something as influential and famous as that opera house a failure.

The two biggest takeaways are the things you can do to make a project successful and the factors that lead to a project failing. In terms of success, I noted the use of the Triple Constraint of time, cost, and scope to ensure a balance between these two for the greatest chance of success. I also learned about the use of Key Performance Indicators, something many companies use to track progress. Along with KPIs, I learned about the S.M.A.R.T. method of making goals, something that goes hand-in-hand with KPIs to ensure a project is on the right track. In terms of failure, I learned a few ways that failure arises, with one of the greatest reasons being scope creep, which is a constantly changing set of goals for the project levied by the project manager, the sponsors, or even the people working on the project themselves. All these things could be applied to my own professional career to make sure my own projects go smoothly, as many careers how utilize projects and the project management methodology to get things done.

**9/10**

This week, we talked more about the traits of a good project manager and what constitutes good leadership. What resonated most with me this session is that while technical skills and interpersonal skills are both elements that a project manager should have, the interpersonal skills are regarded as the more important skills in a good project manager. Specifically, a person with slightly better interpersonal skills than technical knowledge on their project is preferred over one who has more technical knowledge than interpersonal skills.

The second takeaway I gained from this lesson was that the project manager also must manage the stakeholders, people or departments that the project manager may or may not have any authority over. Often, the project manager has no authority over these stakeholders, especially higher-ups and project sponsors, so they have to make sure there is effective communication happening to keep stakeholders appeased. To do this, project managers can use “influence” in the form of different “currencies,” such as task-related, personal-related, or relationship-related actions to make sure stakeholders are satisfied. These strategies to do with influence are definitely something to keep in mind in the professional space, even if I am not as involved in project management, as it can be beneficial to any career.

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**9/25**

This week we talked about two things: how to best staff a project and the details about a project life cycle. To begin with the former, it is important to understand how teams are formed currently, with convenience at the forefront of the reasons to put someone on a team rather than qualification or investment into the project. This needs to be reversed: in order to give a project a higher chance of success, a team needs to be built searching for certain characteristics, such as their fit into the team, their fit into their role, their passion for the project, and their ability to do what is needed of them, for example. It is also important to make sure that members of the team have spikes of talent in different areas instead of concentration in one, as a variety of talent will bring in different perspectives and feedback about the status and methodology of a project, which is conducive to success.

Regarding project life cycles, while it is important to understand that each of the many steps of the cycle are important, extra emphasis needs to be placed in our corporate world on the introductory and finalizing steps of the project. We must overcome the eagerness to start and finish to ensure that the project itself runs smoothly with the required personnel and the project itself can lead to more success in the future with a strong conclusion. However, that is not to say that the introduction and conclusion should not be prioritized over the project planning and execution steps. The project planning and execution steps have multiple elements to them that need attention, and each one must be completed well in order to ensure that the work being done is productive and brings the project toward success. What really surprised me, though, was the vagueness of the closure steps. Although the two steps are labeled “perform project closure” and “review project completion,” it is no wonder that these steps get neglected. Though few in number, the work that each step entails is large, and cannot be neglected if the company wishes to have greater success in the future.

**10/1**

One of the biggest takeaways this week was the distinction between a group and a team. While both exist within a workspace, teams are the necessary structure to create effective contribution to a project. In order to make sure teams are formed as opposed to groups, it is important to understand that teams differ in goals, synergy, accountability, and skills, having less of a personal connection and more of a goal-oriented and professional connection between members. This creates the benefits of varied skillsets, division of labor, different perspectives, which would lead to better and quicker solutions and decisions.

The second takeaway is how teams can be so high-performing. These include many elements, but the ones that stand out to me are sharing a sense of common purpose, maintaining a problem-solving focus, and accepting differences. These stand out because the first one creates coherence within the team, the second one creates a focus for the team to progress, and the third greatly reduces the amount of conflict a team might have. Of course, I will keep all of this in mind in my professional career, as team are almost always created for projects, and they are one of the first steps toward a successful project.

**10/15**

The presentation that resonated with me the most was the personality type approach to communication. Of course, not everyone fits into certain character types, and character types in themselves cannot encapsulate the tendencies of a person, but they can provide a great outline and a good first approach to communicating effectively with another person. It is absolute fact that people think differently, and as a result, interpret words differently. Therefore, the ability to recognize character types and tailor interactions can lead to positive, effective, and meaningful communication, at least, from the start. The takeaway I got from this is that these personality types are a great starting point for communication between project manager and team member, and then interactions and communications can be refined from there once a project leader gets to know that member of the team better.

A second topic that resonated with me was the presentation on scope creep. Previously, I thought that scope creep was something that should be completely avoided, as it leads to unreasonable goals and failed projects. However, I learned that scope creep can contribute positively to a project, whether it be to further the team's ambitions or impress sponsors. The issue with scope creep comes when it gets out of control, and then the project will have to miss deadlines and may ultimately fail. Therefore, I learned that while uncontrolled scope creep is bad for a project, scope creep is a natural and sometimes even beneficial part of a project that needs to be controlled in order to satisfy the ambitions of the team and hopefully impress sponsors by adding features not part of the original plan and showing the true efficacy of a project team and competency of the project manager.

**10/23**

This week we talked about how to launch projects, specifically the planning and initiating phase of the project life cycle. One of the best ways and takeaways from this session is that to make sure a project launches correctly and becomes successful is the creation of a project plan, a formal document that details specific aspects of the project such as the rationale of the project, the methodology of the project, or expected outcomes of the project. This document is important as a reference point for all stakeholders of the project to be on the same page; not only would someone like the sponsors and customers like to know what kind of deliverables they will be receiving, but the team members can also reference the document to understand the final overarching goals of the project.

The second takeaway from this session is the way to categorize good and meaningful project objectives with the S.M.A.R.T. method. This method ensures that project objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time terminated, ensuring that the desires of the project can be easily quantified and tangible. For example, specificity is important because intangible measures such as “make it better” have many interpretations, and can lead to miscommunication among project team members and miscommunication between project team and sponsors and customers.

**10/30**

This session was more of an interactive session of putting our skills that we had learned to use in some scenarios. For the first two group questions, we were asked about project charters and effective milestones. For the project charter, we reaffirmed the importance of the charter, as a reference for all stakeholders to use in case of confusion, miscommunication, or a misunderstanding of elements of the project. As a high-level document, the project charter contains general objectives, plans, methods of communication, responsibilities, and risks, among other things, that all move toward this purpose. Thus, starting a project with an approved project charter is very important.

In my group, we were tasked with the scenario of dealing with some team members not knowing what their responsibilities were or owning their part of the project. In our response, we talked about how the project manager should try to call meetings with the individual members to reiterate their project responsibilities and possibly go over the project charter with them, but we were told that was not enough to remedy the situation. The reasoning was that if a few people within the project were having trouble understanding, it was likely that more people within the project do not have the same understanding and that the whole project team has to readdress the goals and objectives of the project with a meeting around the project charter. This was the second takeaway, that a small bit of turmoil within a team can be masking a greater issue, and a project manager has to be aware of that.

**11/6**

This week the class focused around communication. One of the biggest takeaways of this lesson was the focus on listening when communicating with others. I was surprised by quite a few things in this lesson, one of them being that 45% of our communication, the plurality, is attributed to hearing. I was also surprised to learn that we spend 70% of our time awake and active communicating with others. Thus, I understood the greater focus we need to put on effective and strong communication, and the biggest takeaway from this section of the presentation was an outline of the functions and goals of communication. I already knew that communication was necessary to do things like developing relationships and sharing information, but some things I had not thought about were functions like influencing others and enhancing and maintaining a sense of self. However, when these were introduced, I agree with them. Communication has always been a way to influence other people, from speeches to one-on-one meetings. Furthermore, maintaining a sense of self, while more philosophical, also makes sense, because a sense of self can also be derived from others’ perceptions of you, which are formed by communication.

The second biggest takeaway is the important of non-verbal communication when conveying information. Another statistic during this lesson also surprised me, that a study showed that the face, a completely non-verbal element of communication, conveyed 55% of the information. Even the fact that the words conveyed only 7% was interesting as well. Therefore, the things I might think about in a more professional environment are the non-verbal elements as listed in the presentation, such as eye contact, facial expression, and even gestures and postures when speaking to emphasize what I may be talking about and the message I want to convey.

**11/13**

This week focused on the risks and conflict management necessary to make a project successful. One of the first and biggest takeaways from this lesson is that conflict is not something to be avoided during the course of a project. Not only does conflict represent an investment of a team member into the success of a project, but it also presents an opportunity for understanding between two parties when an agreement is reached and provides a source of passion and energy for the project when managed correctly. However, the drawbacks of conflict still exist, such as the ability to grind projects to a halt when an agreement cannot be reached, or creating personal grudges between people that might impact the workflow of the project. However, this takeaway involves breaking some of the misconceptions about conflict, not just the one that states that “conflict should be avoided.” Conflict resolutions cannot always please everyone, although ideally it should, and the manager is not always responsible for intervening and providing a fix, sometimes there are benefits to allowing the team members to resolve the conflict themselves. All in all, effective conflict management leads to greater engagement in the project, which leads to a better and faster product due to greater contribution and discussion from all team members.

The second takeaway from this lesson were the methods to resolve conflict. This was introduced through the Thomas-Kilmann conflict modes, which were competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Although collaborating has the most ideal final outcome, each of these strategies have their benefits and drawbacks, and none of them are to be ignored when considering conflict resolution. For example, it seems that avoidance is the worst strategy out of all of these, being complete withdrawal from the situation, but it provides the benefits of allocating project manager time to other, more important functions, while allowing team members to develop their own communication skills by solving the problem themselves. Even collaborating has its drawbacks, as it is the solution that takes the most time in order to consider both sides to seek the “win-win” outcome. Sometimes, there just is not enough time in a project timeline to pursue this win-win every time a conflict arises. Thus, this concept of considering all styles of conflict resolution is something I will take to my professional career, as it is also useful as a project team member in addition to a project team manager position.

**12/4**

This week the focus was on ethical challenges within a project. The first takeaway was the definition of ethics within a project management standpoint. Although the general definition still holds, as a clarification and a divide between “right and wrong,” within project management the question shifts toward a professional perspective. As a focus on relationships within a professional setting, project managers are concerned about their professional reputation when making decisions about a project toward the goal of being known as “good or honest.” However, this is not simple, as detailed by the slide regarding some causes of misconduct in project management, such as pressure to meet targets, or prioritization of ends over means. Just the anecdote about the internet link in India from the professor details an ethical dilemma that project managers face all the time. Therefore, I understand now how ethics are an important part of project management.

The second biggest takeaway are then the strategies to try and remain ethical as a project manager. Ethics in project management stems from honesty, although extra strategies are necessary to fulfill ethical goals. For example, project managers must keep stakeholders equal, despite the unequal nature of things such as multiple sponsors donating different sums of money or services, or different tiers of managers and their power within the project. Thus, it is important to not let one stakeholder dominate the discussion and integrate the opinions of all stakeholders and manage conflict resolution and transparency as applicable. Another example is the duty of a project manager to accept and assign responsibility for a project, through both failure and success. This is done through assigning the correctly responsibilities and duties for each member of the project and look for problems and resolutions while creating these responsibilities and making sure they are carried out. Even as the project closes, project managers should revisit these responsibilities to make sure the project ends productively as well.

**Final Reflection**

Coming into this course, I was already quite interested in projects and managing them. I had just begun to take leadership style roles in hackathons with my team, and I was curious to see what kind of strategies existed in the project management world that could possibly help streamline our workflow for just those twenty-four hours that a hackathon takes place in.

One of the first takeaways from the course that I will apply soon is that conflict is something to be controlled in a project, and not avoided. When conflict comes during our hackathon projects, usually in the early morning hours of 3-4 A.M. when irritability is at its highest, I know now to embrace the conflict and work on a resolution involving both parties. This is analogous to something that may happen during overtime or a behind-schedule project in a professional setting, and so learning concepts such as the five Thomas-Kilmann conflict resolution modes allows me to identify the correct methodology to take when resolving conflicts to make sure that the project can progress both during my hackathons and in my future professional career.

This idea of management rather than avoidance is sort of a motif for what I have learned from this course. This concept also applied to my perception of scope creep. Originally, when I was introduced to the idea of scope creep, I wondered why anyone would want to have scope creep. Why not deny any further changes to the project, from any source? Wouldn’t any changes be unnecessary and only detract from the probability of completing the projects to specifications? During my hackathons, my only real experience with projects, implementing things we had not originally agreed upon rarely comes to fruition, and often results in wasted time that could have been spent working on the core functionality of the project. However, I quickly learned that this idea of denying all scope creep was unrealistic, and a perspective only a poor project leader would inherit. Scope creep can be implemented sometimes, all depending on the impact that the change has on the timeline, where the proposed change originates from, and the impact that the change will have on the final product. For example, a change that has little impact on the timeline introduced by a member of the project team that would impress the sponsors and the customers almost seems like a no-brainer to implement into the final product. Even though most examples are not that simple, it goes to show how scope creep can be beneficial in specific situations.

What definitely surprised me near the end of the course was the lesson on communication, especially the breakdown of how we communicate. To think that we spend 70% of our active time communicating, with 45% of that listening and 30% of that talking, in which during talking 55% of our meaning is displayed through non-verbal means are all statistics that I would never have made up on my own. However, when presented with the statistics, they reveal new insights about how I should communicate, including placing a greater emphasis on listening skills and thinking more about non-verbal communication when speaking such as eye contact or posture. This can be especially applied in professional contexts where effectively conveying information is a valuable skill to foster relationship growth and productivity between myself and other coworkers. Additionally, from a project management standpoint, effective communication is important to convey accurate and specific information about projects to avoid misinformation and confusion within a team and toward sponsors. The project manager is constantly communicating and coordinating different elements of a project, and a greater understanding of communication in general will definitely benefit me in a professional setting.

Overall, I learned a lot from this course, and especially learned many things that will help me not only in a professional career, but also in my day-to-day school life and projects I might take up before my career, setting me up for greater successes. I am glad to have taken and learned from this course.

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| **Top 5 Takeaways** | **Why did you choose this one?** | **How can you use this professionally?** |
| Conflict is something to be controlled, not avoided | This was one of the main concepts that really surprised me. Usually, I am the type to get along and simply cooperate, so being told that conflict is a beneficial thing was against my usual way of thinking. | I will try to stray away from completely avoiding or suppressing conflict, instead embracing it and utilizing it to get people involved and increase the quality of the final product of the project. |
| Scope Creep and how to deal with it | Scope creep has been a concept we have touched upon during the whole semester, and for good reason. It is a very common reason why projects fail, yet some project managers allow scope creep from multiple sources cause failure in their projects. | Professionally, I will now be able to define a project charter so that requirements are laid out from the beginning, so I can recognize any changes that would constitute scope creep. I would then know how to control scope creep to ensure that both the project can finish on time and that stakeholders are satisfied. |
| Effective Team Creation | Team creation is one of the first challenges a project faces, and without effective team creation considering personalities, skills, investment in the project, and other personality traits, some projects can be doomed from the start. | I will apply the concept of not trying to add the most “convenient” people to a team, but the most qualified people, as this would lead to greatest project success. Also, I would know how to look for beneficial character traits such as honesty and trust, and know to staff people with varying, specialized skills instead of creating a team with the same set of skills to have a greater and more diverse batch of perspectives. |
| Key Performance Indicators/Effective Milestones | It is very important to track progress of a project, and without effective milestones in place, there may be no tangible progress made, leading to loss of team morale, loss of confidence from sponsors and functional team leaders, and loss of loyalty from customers. Furthermore, effective milestones can coordinate team progress toward the goal and prevent miscommunication and confusion. | I can apply the S.M.A.R.T. principle to effective milestones in order to create meaningful goals that can be achieved. Making each of the goals specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-terminated ensures that the team has goals that focus and bring the team together to complete them toward the common end goal of the project. Furthermore, establishing KPIs allow all stakeholders and myself as a project manager to keep a pulse on the project and monitor progress and adjust timelines and project management strategies accordingly. |
| Communication and its purposes | Communication is very important, not just in a project management standpoint, but also from a social and personal standpoint. Learning about and quantifying the different goals of communication, such as exerting influence or keeping a sense of self, helped me understand how communication should be used in any setting, not just project management. | With the knowledge that communication serves multiple purposes, I can tailor my communication and methods to achieve multiple goals at once. Also, with the knowledge of how people convey a majority of their information non-verbally, I can use this in a professional space by focusing on my non-verbal actions as much as my verbal actions when doing thing such as communicating with a project member one-on-one or with many members in a presentation setting. |