475 Project Management Discussion Board Questions:

**Week 1:**

Which stage of the four stages of the project life cycle do you think is most critical for project success? Discuss and explain your choice.

Tom has been a project manager at ETW Nautical Supplies for about five years. Today, like most days, Tom arrives at his office an hour early. He spends the first 30 minutes reading his e-mails and catching up on voicemails. Then he saunters down to cafeteria where he gets his morning coffee and chats with his coworkers and reports as they filter in to get their own coffees. He gets delayed by Marge, a member of one of his core teams, who is excited to show him photos of her new grandson, Oliver. This means he gets back to his office a little later than planned. He spends about an hour sending e-mails and returning phone calls, before he takes a stroll through Cubicle Alley, as he calls it. He stops by each team member’s desk to check in. “What’s happening?” he queries each person. These ritual stops have become known at ETW as drive-bys. Just as he begins to prepare for a project meeting with his team on the crucial Sail2020 project, he gets an angry phone call from a vendor for Sail2020 complaining that the team is now asking for extra features that were not in the original specs and that adding those features will double the price of the parts. Tom tells him that he will find out what is going on and get back him. After slamming the phone down, Tom returns to Cubicle Alley and begins yelling, “What the heck is going on here? Why didn’t anyone tell me this earlier?” After spending 45 minutes getting to the bottom of the problem, Tom learns it is the client who is making these demands to the team. Tom stomps back to his office, and calls the client, who doesn’t answer. Now Tom is behind schedule getting his meeting organized, so he works through lunch to get the agenda for the Spinnaker2014 project finished. There’s no sense sending it out, as they will meet in 15 minutes at 1:30 p.m.

Tom arrives at the meeting room on time, but team members trickle in until 1:45 p.m. During this time, Marge pulls out the photos of Oliver and shows them to the team members present. They then pull out the photos of their kids and grandchildren to share. The meeting doesn’t get started until 1:50 p.m. At 2:14, Tom’s boss Mary Sue arrives. She apologizes for being late and explains why she is so busy. Everyone listens. Then, Tom summarizes what Mary Sue missed. The meeting gets back on track at 2:25 p.m., only to have two critical members of the team leave, explaining they have another meeting at 3 p.m. across the expansive ETW corporate campus. Mary Sue gets impatient, and wants a quick summary of just where the project is in terms of deadlines. She hears a summary of what the team has done. At 2:55 p.m., Mary Sue leaves, saying she wants an update on her desk by the end of business that day. The meeting breaks up shortly after 3 p.m. Tom announces he will send out a Doodle to find a time for the next meeting. When Tom returns to his office, he has an irate message from the client, who says he isn’t satisfied with the progress on the project. Tom immediately calls him and tries to explain that the added features the client wants are out of scope and will drive up the cost of the project. The client threatens to fire ETW and take his business elsewhere. Tom manages to arrange a meeting at the client’s office tomorrow morning. Hanging up the phone at about 4 p.m., Tom feels exhausted, so he shuts his office door, turns off the computer and turns down the ringer on his desk phone and cell phone and takes a 20-minute power nap. When his alarm awakens him, he begins writing that project update Mary Sue has asked for but has to make a couple of calls to the team to get some of the specific information she wants. It is shortly after 6 p.m. when Tom e-mails the update to Mary Sue. Victoria, another ETW project manager, stops by his office. She is in a crunch with a key project and needs to get more hours this week from the IT person she and Tom share. They work out a schedule, and Victoria leaves saying, “Thanks, Tom. I owe you one.” Tom answers a few critical e-mails and packs his briefcase for his meeting with the client tomorrow and leaves his office around 7 p.m.

* What did Tom do that you think are smart practices for a project manager?
* What might he have done better?
* How effective do you think Tom is as a project manager?
* If you were to make one recommendation to Tom, what would it be?

How do you think your organizational culture influences projects in your organization, whether that organization is a corporation, a small business, a nonprofit, or a volunteer organization?

* What are the advantages of a smaller organization, less than 20 employees, when it comes to managing projects?
* What are the disadvantages?
* What are the advantages of a large organization, more than 200 employees, for managing projects?
* What are its disadvantages?

Be as specific as possible. Use real world examples wherever possible.

We'll use a similar thread each Session to address MS Project questions, concerns and general collaboration in expressing the current material in the tool.

**Week 2**

What are the Discussion Board expectations per the Session 1 Introductory/Overview Sync Session?

Think of a project you have been or are currently involved with that doesn’t have a project scope statement. What problems have you encountered?

I was recently working on a Demand Transfer analytics project. The lack of a project scope statement resulted in unnecessary data being mined, analyzed, and synthesized. In addition, the project results felt muddled and ambiguous.

How might a project scope statement have helped the project team avoid some of these problems?

A project scope statement would have focused and honed in on specific analytical techniques and desired outcomes.

Effective and productive meetings are rare. What irritates you the most about poorly run meetings?

Poorly run meeting can be fun, especially watching the type A individuals, but the lack of direction, activation, and focus is particularly frustrating.

What best practices can we use to run a good meeting? Let’s share.

Best practices will include:

A Fast, Fun, and Friendly (FFF) event

An engaging host/facilitator that has thought about the desired outcomes for the meeting

Purposeful strategic implementation to engage more reserved team members

A sense of mutual buy-in for the work being done beyond the meeting

Assigned follow-up work that correlates with team members strengths

Michael has agreed to head the committee to run this year’s pee wee ice hockey tournament. He gathers his committee together for its first meeting and leads a brainstorming session for how this year’s tournament should be run.   
  
The discussion rapidly disintegrates into a complaint session about prior tournaments. A few people do most of the talking and a couple say nothing at all. The meeting runs long, and several people leave before it is over. Other than making some subcommittee assignments based on who volunteered for each committee, little is decided.   
  
After the meetings, Jane who has successfully run the food concessions for the last five years calls Michael to say she is just too busy to help out this year. Two other committee members also call to say they don’t think they will have time right now to help out but maybe another time.  
  
How would developing a WBS alleviate some of the problems that occurred during the first meeting and help Michael organize and plan the project?

A Work Breakdown Structure probably would have: kept the best talent form leaving the team, allowed for tactical implementation for specific complaints, inspired committee members to lead change, assign roles, communicate key deliverables, and establish major deliverables.

What might he have done before the first meeting?

Michael could have done the following before the meeting: created a loose agenda, written out team member strengths, written a rough draft of the WBS chart or had a blank chart ready to be filled in during the meeting (group collaboration depending on his leadership style), written out a project scope statement for this year’s committee, and create an FFF event that would curb the complaining attitude.

**Week 3**

Often top management dictates the deliverables for a project, telling the team what the scope will be, the available budget, and the deadline. In many situations, what they want is not realistic.

How might you use the estimates from a work breakdown structure to help them see what is and is not realistic?

From working on multiple USAID projects and private industry projects, I have seen disparate expectations from management and the implementation team. A major contributing factor was the transition from strategy to tactic and management often was too embedded in overall strategy that their grounding was lost. A pithy work breakdown structure visualization (WBSZ) is a great way to bridge the strategy/tactic divide. Timeliness is key, and utilizing team members is key for a broad reaching WBSZ. Take for example a USAID project. Please refer to the attachment for the WBSZ. Management consists of beneficiaries and the CEO, and the Housing WBS is a high level overview of the actual costs bases on actual contractor estimates. The goal is to get this document in front of key management with the intent to let them iterate as necessary. This takes a great deal of agility, but it keeps ownership and decision making at the same level. Also, in my experience, the WBSZ is a great way to manage up.

Have any of you faced such a situation? If so, how have you handled it and how did it work out?

I was working as a Project Manager in Alaska with the beneficiaries (B) on site and senior management (SM) was in the lower 48 states. Having a modified WBSZ allowed me to stay out of the strategic grid-iron that took place between B and SM. Ultimately the project faced major financial cut backs, a common occurrence in the Non-Profit industry, and since the WBSZ had been in the hands of SM I did not have to deal with the stemming issues. Rather, I was able to focus on project management and collaboration with SM to make iteration from the WBSZ.

Sometimes estimates are based on a past project, but instead of counting the number of hours an employee worked (e.g. 10-hour days), the number of days is only counted. For example, you might say that for project X, we had two employees spend five days each on this task. But, you only count the five days, not the fact that each employee worked 10 hours each of those days.

How can this affect future estimates? What is the danger of this practice? If you have any experience with this in your real life, please share it.

DB2

Linear estimates and financial estimates should be handled in completely different systems. The standardization of metrics is essential to establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) Having a day metric is not suitable for standardization across a project, and simply should not be used given that it is ambiguous, prone for miscommunication, and does not acquiesce with payroll.

Think of a situation, perhaps on a project team, where you had to make some estimates. How did you go about deriving them?

Estimates for analytical projects are derived from complexity, similarity of past projects, and due date.

Did you gather information from other sources? If so, who or what?

Other teams and business pyramids are often viable sources for gathering estimates.

What did you find was most helpful in developing realistic estimates?

On analytical projects, I continually keep the beneficiary in the communication loop and factor in about a 30% unforeseen delay for risk.

And conversely, what methods did you try that you did not find helpful? What would you do differently if you had to repeat this estimating?

Trying to build an estimate from the ground up is often too “micro” of a process that ends in wasted time and frustration. I have also estimated in areas where I do not have expertise which proves to be inaccurate. As a result of the above failures, I estimate from top down and seek the advice of subject matter experts.

**Week 4**

There are numerous precedence diagramming software packages available. Select one, preferably one that another student has not already reviewed, and check it out. Write a brief review of it for the class.

The longest path through a network also indicates the minimum amount of time needed for a project. What concept does this statement refer to and why is it important to know? How can the longest path determine the shortest project duration?

Why is slack important to a project manager and what is the difference between free and total slack?

**Scope Definition and Realistic Expectations**

You are asked to be the project manager for a state of the art project to develop an interactive TV network for Company CWT. This project included technologies that still needed to be invented and included functions such as video on demand, on-line shopping, interactive multi-player games, etc. At the time of this project, this was leading edge and preceded the functions which we now take for granted on the internet.

When you joined the executive management meeting, each representative described his/her role and re-confirmed that his piece of the project would be done on time. As you were listening, you became concerned at the level of effort and the reconfirmation of the year end completion date (this meeting was in March). At the end of the meeting, you were asked what you thought and you told them that you were still evaluating all the information since this was your initial meeting. The key executive re-emphasized to you the absolute need for a year end completion and that this date has been highly publicized to the media.

Very quickly, you and your team performed analysis which determined some of the following:

• some key work segments had not been identified and responsibility for these had not been assigned,  
• some technology was leading edge and had to be invented and then manufactured, and  
• over 10 outside co-participating companies were involved in this project.

Your team concluded that the year-end completion date was probably infeasible and even completion by the end of year 2 would be a challenge. (You received a "hearty reception" when the analysis was presented.)  
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**Questions:** (with the completion of Assignment #4, you have learned to use planning tools and techniques to evaluate this project scope and schedule.)

1. Which tools & techniques (that you have learned in the course so far) would you use to evaluate the deliverables and completion date?  
2. How would you use the tools & techniques?  
3. What would be your response to the following points:   
a) We have plenty of time. It is only March and we have through the end of the year.  
b) What would it take to finish by the end of the year?

  BTW...You were interviewed by the Wall Street Journal after the successful completion of the project. The major question that you got was "Why was the project a year late?" Share an excerpt of your response!

**Week 5**

Read the *10 Golden Rules of Project Risk Management* and select the three you think are the most important. Then, explain your reasoning.

Read the *Deliberate Ignorance in Project Risk Management* article. Have you ever observed deliberate ignorance in assessing risk in any projects you have been involved with? What can be done to minimize this problem? What will you do as a project manager to ensure the risk analysis of the projects you lead will be thorough but still avoid analysis paralysis?

What are the major differences between managing negative risks vs. positive risks (opportunities)?

**Week 6**

Beyond the text reading, I feel we critically overlook the all important topic(s) of resource loading and leveling. Share your understanding of the two techniques, why they're important and any lessons learned you have around their use.

We’ve considered reducing scope and adding resources to accelerate and/or shorten the duration of a project. Share your experiences of how you’ve seen this done effectively (or not). Any experiences with text techniques for either (non)resource constrained situations? Any other favorite non-text techniques to achieve this result?

One common solution for getting a project back on schedule is to throw more resources at it by having everyone work longer days. What are the dangers of this? How might this practice end up driving up the total costs for the project? Real life examples are welcome.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of reducing project scope to accelerate a project? What can be done to reduce these disadvantages?

**Week 7**

Most project teams have members from all generations—baby boomers, Generation X, and the millennials. This is presenting some new challenges to managing these teams. Read the article posted under Course Content regarding managing millennials. What does a project manager need to keep in mind when managing a multigenerational team? What advantages does each generation bring to a project team?

What managerial practices distinguish a good manager from an average one? What practices distinguish someone as a leader? What leadership best practices have you observed that you think would serve a project manager well? Why?

Think of a team project you have been involved with in the past or are currently involved in now, preferably one at work. Would you say that the team was high-performing, dysfunctional, or typical? Describe the team dynamics to support your answer. Analyze the development of the team in terms of the five-phase model and the punctuated equilibrium model. If the team was high-performing, what made it so? Did the project manager foster this in some way? If so, how? If the team was not high-performing, what could the project manager have done to improve the team dynamics and performance? What have you learned from your experience on this team that you would apply when you are a project manager?

Have you ever lived or worked in another country? If so, share what you learned about adjusting to a new culture.

**Week 8**

I posted under Course Content\Session 8\EVMS Tutorials eight totorials (they are actually pdfed ppts) of the concepts and techniques of EVMS, soup to nuts. Many posts here suggests there's some interest. Lots of material, and real well done by a prominent Fed sector service provider. Let me know if you have questions/comments!

Use the Internet to find a case in which a project failed to fulfill its projective objectives, with serious financial consequences. Discuss how using EVA might have helped the organization make smarter decisions and avoid this failure.

Discuss the advantages of earned value analysis (EVA) in monitoring the progress and performance of a project. If you can, apply this methodology to a real life project you are familiar with, perhaps one you have been involved with. What challenges do you identify in moving an organization to using EVA as a project monitoring tool?

I thought I would highlight a successful "public sector" project, the building of the Eiffel Tower.

http://www.managementcanvas.iimindore.in/icanvas/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=120:management-lessons-from-gustave-eiffel&catid=44:other-areas&Itemid=61  
  
We could all learn lessons from Gustave Eiffel.  He may not have had all the technical tools we have, but he clearly had a vision, a seemingly well-defined scope, and an ability to stay on top of the project the rest of the way.  Heck, he believed in it so much, he provided a majority of the construction costs in exchange for 20-year revenue stream.     
  
Though I know there are many failed investments, this example illustrates some pretty amazing managerial prowess.

Express our progress on this weeks DB (a single 7-day activity) at end-of-day (EOD) Weds in terms of EV.

Use 7 day activity duration, last week’s total 565 posts (PV) allocated evenly per day, dollarize posts - $1/post. Actual costs each day are 40, 60, 80, 80, 100, 125 and 80 (M - Su). Use % complete as the # of posts EOD Weds.

What is EV, CV, SV, CPI and SPI? What would a status report highlight?

Responses are due no later than midnight Friday, 16 Aug, on this thread.

**Week 9**

Your organization is losing money and credibility due to a run of failed projects. You want to convince your boss that what is needed is a project office to oversee the organization’s projects. Read the Ibbs and Kwank article and the Pennypacker and Grant paper. What important facts can you glean from these articles that will help you make a case for needing a project office?

Assess where your organization (past or current) is on the project maturity model and make recommendations to take the organization to the next level. What support might you expect to have? What might be sources of resistance and how might you deal with them?

How would you respond to the COO that requests your input  
and ideas for developing capability in the organization to manage projects with  
much greater predictability?

**Week 10**

What have you learned about project management that you think will be most useful to you in your future career? Why?

Your boss asks you to conduct a one-hour lunch-and-learn on what you learned from project management. What will you include in your workshop? How will you make your selection?

You’re at a cocktail party and meet a seasoned project manager. What questions would you ask him/her and why?