The Fluent Blade Cuts Cleanly

Tao of the Zentropist

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF BLACK ROCK CONSULTING

Project management is not a particularly mysterious process, but rather, a collection of methodologies and clearly delineated guidelines and checklists that break a project down into specific tasks, assign accountability, and ensure that the wheels don't come off the wagon…

Volume II, No. 3

Official Publication of

Black Rock consulting

Los Angeles, California

Project Management Comes of Age

No longer just a skill set, project management is now a career field

As the old marketing slogan states, "You've come a long way, baby."

In the past few years, project management has exploded in popularity, with a number of brick and mortar colleges and universities, as well as their online counterparts offering courses, including "certificate programs" that imply that the individual with this credential is now a bona-fide "project manager." Even the Project Management Institute (PMI) has gotten into the act, heavily promoting its Project Management Professional (PMP) credential which a few years ago, was seldom encountered.

Project Management Basics

Don't get me wrong, I believe quite firmly that project management is a necessary and legitimate career endeavor, and generally speaking both formal and "on the job" training have their roles in developing one's associated skill set, but I would hesitate to suggest that completing some online courses or earning a certificate necessarily make one a competent project manager, no matter how many GANTT charts or process diagrams are generated.

Quite frankly, despite attempts by some to the contrary, project management is not a particularly mysterious process full of arcane and esoteric information, but rather, a collection of methodologies (a number of which exist) and clearly delineated guidelines and checklists that break a project down into specific tasks, assign accountability to individuals or teams, and ensure that the wheels don't come off the wagon and that key stakeholders know what's going on at all times.

Establish Project Phases

Because of my work in both traditional and digital entertainment in production-oriented, creative environments, I find it helpful to generally use a 5-stage framework, with associated high-level goals and milestones, along with corresponding written deliverables, which clearly signal the kick-off and closure (via written sign-offs) of each phase. The system is designed to ensure a smooth process flow and if properly implemented, prevents a project from derailing due to misunderstandings or insufficient planning and agreement on what the final product is.

The project phases that I find can generally be universally applied are:

- ***Discovery:*** This is where key stakeholders set up the general parameters and scope of the engagement,

Put simply, a Five Phase approach to managing projects can almost be applied universally: Discovery, Definition, Design, Development (Production) and Deployment (Testing and Product Launch).

perform background research, and set up the collaborative team infrastructure. Finalizing a **Project Charter** should be one of the key objectives of this phase.

- ***Definition:*** Once the Project Charter is established, along with the general scope, it is necessary to clearly articulate the business case behind a project, a step which I find is sometimes overlooked during interactive technology engagements. People become overly excited by the whiz-bang factor and forget why their creating a solution in the first place. As such, a critical written deliverable that needs to come out of this phase is a **Business Requirements** Document.

Design: Having established what we want to create and why, there is often quite a bit of creative latitude involved in the "how" part of the equation. For all the talk that "form follows function" (in an ideal world), this needs to be carefully considered and it is essential that all decision-makers agree on the blueprints. Consequently, I advocate the creation of both **Functional Specifications** and **Technical Specifications** documents; while some may choose to combine these documents, I personally feel that before any technical decisions are made, the functionality must be locked down, because technology should support desired functionality, which in term is driven by business decisions, and not the reverse!

- ***Development (Production):*** This is the true "nuts-and-bolts" portion of a project, where the implementation team actually assembles the product according to specifications. During this phase, it is especially important for the project manager to produce regular status reports and track tasks and interdependencies to prevent slippage in the schedule which in turn may impact the budget and profitability.

- ***Deployment:*** This final phase involves the quality assurance testing (both internal and external) of the product to ensure that it conforms to specifications and is bug-free, as well as the product launch, which in some instances may necessitate hand-off to another department, such as marketing. Proper closure procedures should be maintained, including sign-off on all phases of testing and acceptance of the final product.

For Additional Information:

For further information regarding our project management capabilities: www.blackrockconsult.com.

To follow the **"Tao of the Zentropist"** blog and to continue your Zentropist education, join us online: http://zentropist.wordpress.com.

Send comments or suggestions to: zentropist@blackrockconsult.com.

If you no longer wish to receive this publication, please send an email to: unsubscribe@blackrockconsult.com.

Want to learn more?

Download my "Eleven Make or Break Project Management Tips" White Paper today!

http://zentropist.wordpress.com

Black Rock consulting

11901 Santa Monica Blvd.

Unit #390

Los Angeles, CA 90025

310.598.6161

