Project Management

There is often much confusion about what a project is, so it must be defined precisely in order to discuss it properly. A project is a unique, one-time undertaking that has a clear goal, activities and tasks, interrelated dependencies and finite duration. This is in contrast to a process, such as the production of dishwashers on an assembly line, which is repetitive and has no stopping point. In theory, a manufacturing cycle can go on forever.

All projects are subject to constraints, and there are typically four major constraints: scope, quality, cost and time. The scope of a project is the size of the endeavor. Using a wedding as an example, the scope of the project is how many people will be invited, how many bridesmaids, ushers, etc. As far as quality is concerned, the bride and groom have to decide whether they want an event worthy of a Hollywood star or something simple. Whether the wedding dress is a Givenchy or pret-a-porter. The cost constraint is the budget that the couple have, while the time constraint is how long they have to organize the event.

All of these constraints are interdependent. If one is changed, it affects the others. In the wedding example, you cannot add people to the invitation list without an increase in the cost of the reception. Or, if the budget is lowered, the number of people invited must be cut in order to maintain the same level of quality or you can lower the level of quality to keep the number of people invited the same, but this type of change has an impact on the stakeholders.

The stakeholders in a project are simply the people who have an interest in the outcome of the project itself. In the case of a wedding, the main stakeholders are the bride and the groom, but the goup of stakeholders is not limited to them. It also includes the parents of the couple, their relatives and friends, not to mention the professionals employed to organize the event.

Project Manager

The project manager is the person responsible for reaching the goals set for the project given the constraints on scope, quality, cost and time. What are the qualities, skills and knowledge needed to perform the job of a project manager? As far as knowledge is concerned, we can use the example of building a bridge to make things a little clearer. Naturally, the project manager cannot know everything there is to know about every job that needs to be done to complete the bridge. However, she has to have some technical background, otherwise she can't interface with the experts who are responsible for the various deliverables, nor would she be able to understand whether the project is going in the right direction or not without such a background. Simply possessing the requisite technical background, however, does not qualify someone to be a project manager because she must also plan, coordinate, lead, communicate well, monitor progress, etc. To put this into perspective, just think about all of the problems that the thousands of employees working on the bridge will have. Coordinating all of that work would not be easy either, not to mention how she can motivate all of the

employees to reach their goals. Project Management is the use of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques in the management of the various processes of the project.

Project Processes

In essence, there are six typical project processes: initiate, plan, execute, monitor, check and conclude. The initiation process is the most important as it is when you define the scope of the project, conduct a feasibility study, draft a project charter and define who is on the team. The project charter itself defines the objectives and the deliverables of the project, identifies the stakeholders, defines roles and responsibilities and establishes the responsibility of the project manager. In the planning phase, you define the phases, activities and the jobs that need to be done in order to reach the project goals, as well as resource procurement, economic aspects, quality control and risk management. Planning for risks is, in fact, a crucial factor in the success of any project. The third phase is execution of the project. It is the phase in which all of the planning formulated in the previous phase is implemented. During the monitoring and control phases, the project manager must check the status of the project against its scheduled state of progress. The project manager often has to make changes to ensure that the project is in line with the constraints. Once all of the work has been completed and the customer approves the deliverables, the project must be evaluated in order to highlight any successes and to learn from the experience. This is the conclusion.