

Project Success Method

Introduction



As Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence*, predicted almost twenty years ago, projects pervade every aspect of business today, and the ability to execute projects successfully can be an unparalleled source of competitive advantage.

Companies serve customers and generate revenue by performing processes that produce products and services. The dominant companies in any industry fine-tune their processes to deliver high quality with speed and low cost, and they use sophisticated management systems to plan and control their operations.

But companies build competitive advantage by creating change through the execution of projects. Examples include the development and launching of new products, facilities, systems, and processes, as well as marketing campaigns, mergers or acquisitions, stock offerings, and special events.

The ability to perform projects faster, more effectively, and at lower cost than your competition will generate competitive advantage, especially in a business environment characterized by accelerating change. You need only review recent issues of business periodicals to find examples of companies that have developed dominant positions in their industries based on their consistent ability to beat their competition to the punch.

Everybody thinks they know how to manage projects. In reality, very few companies have developed the skills, tools, and systems required to manage projects successfully.

Projects are, by their very nature, more challenging to manage than routine ongoing operations:

- The scope, objectives, and constraints of projects are often unclear.
- Projects usually have deadlines, and in many cases, the deadline seems nearly impossible to meet.
- Because projects are non-routine, they involve high levels of uncertainty regarding what work must be performed, who will be responsible for what, work methods to be used, as well as the durations, and costs of individual project activities (tasks).
- The number of activities may be in the hundreds or thousands, and the sequencing requirements among the activities may be highly complex.
- The project team often consists of people representing different professional disciplines, functional areas, and organizations. They use different jargon, approach work and problem solving differently, and may even have different personal or organizational objectives. In some cases, they are scattered geographically and may even speak different languages.
- The project manager usually lacks formal authority relative to the members of the team, some of whom may out-rank the project manager in the organizational hierarchy.
- Because members of the project team may be assigned to several projects at once in addition to their regular duties, their total workload is difficult to measure and control. As a result, individuals are often overloaded with work during certain periods.
- The culture of the organization performing the project may not place adequate value on planning and individual accountability.
- Projects offer numerous opportunities for changing priorities, miscommunication, confusion, and conflict.

The key to overcoming these challenges to project management is to develop and commit to the disciplined application of management processes for: (a) concisely defining project requirements, (b) developing comprehensive project plans, and (c) persistently controlling projects during their execution. In addition to maximizing the probability of achieving project success leading to competitive advantage, such processes also vastly improve the quality of work life for project team members.