Mini Steps for Maxi Results

Project management sounds like one of those subjects you hire an outside expert or a consultant to handle. Yet, truth be told, we all manage projects in one way or another, be it business or our household chores. Successful project management is just as much about good habits as it is about anything else.

In the course of Tudog's dealings with a multitude of clients, we're exposed to an array of business practices and cultures representing each different client's corporate ecosystem.

In some cases Tudog is retained to assist in remedying certain practices, while, conversely, in other cases the client's practices become something we need to adapt to in order to deliver the service we were requisitioned to deliver.

When observing corporate culture from the outside, one becomes aware of different practices. At times we might be critical, recognizing weaknesses. In other instances the process of learning to adapt assists us in becoming better at managing our own internal processes.

When implementing a strategy much time is dedicated to defining the long term goals and defining a framework of schedules, milestones and monitoring in order to insure the project is on time and on budget.

Many times one is convinced that a project is on-track only to discover it is way behind schedule as the delivery deadline comes around. Most often, under this scenario, the project manager is left bewildered as he suddenly discovers the project he thought was moving along is behind schedule and there is little to nothing he can do to remedy the situation.

Its common knowledge that an abundance of projects fail to meet their pre-defined schedules, budgets and / or milestones. One would expect that we would be better at deploying tactics to spot the events causing the lag on-the-fly. The reality is that it's not easy to determine when a project is in trouble, and events that seem obvious in retrospect are apparently invisible on a day to day basis.

Monitoring a project's progress needs to be a critical element of the executive's daily routine. Knowing when to step in and with whom to be in touch with during every stage of the project's evolution is critical to the chances of attaining the initial goals and targets so carefully pre-defined. Whether the intervention is to change the course of a hopeless effort or to correct team skill or resource imbalances, managers need to spot difficulties early in order to disasters.

Projects don't slip off track in one day. They fall behind just a bit with every passing day, and the backlog accumulates until noticed – by then it is usually too late. How can you notice the problems and fix them when they are just small hurdles, that is, before they accumulate into major challenges and backlogs?

Project doctrines call for monitoring task completion rates, budget and the hours devoted in order to evaluate the project's status. Unfortunately, these tactics don't eradicate the issues causing the cumulative backlog. Evaluating a project's progress and the status of

its sub-projects and tasks is extremely subjective. Time allocation has no direct correlation with completion (or success) and being "almost" complete has no direct bearing on the completion date.

Most projects are made up of numerous sub-tasks that jointly bring about the completion of the sub-projects that, in turn, lead to the project's successful completion. Each sub-task is usually the result of a multitude of joint efforts achieved over varying time spans

When defining a project, if each sub-task is broken down into "mini-tasks" representing a much smaller spectrum with one person responsible for delivery, the monitoring of the project is simplified by reviewing the status of each mini-task. This system allows on-the-fly reviewing of the individual stumbling blocks that stifle the overall progress and success of the project. One doesn't need to wait until a week prior to the project's due-date to discover that a minor problem has thrown off the whole team's effort.

When structuring a project and deploying the "mini-task" system there are a few basic rules that can improve results.

1. "Mini-Tasks" are Complete or Undone: When measuring progress, there are only two states for "Mini-Tasks". They're either 100% complete, or they're 0% complete. Progress is marked only by final approval of the item. Otherwise, you move into the gray areas of guessing how close to done things are, which is inevitably inaccurate.

2. "Mini-Tasks" have one Address: If the task has more than one person responsible for delivery, it becomes a problem to figure out where the real difficulties lie. Insure that each task has one person in charge and accountable.

3. "Mini-Tasks" have Short Lead Times: Any time a person goes longer than a week without a deliverable, he goes into a black hole of unknown progress. You can't really measure the progress until it's too late. Define very short lead times to insure you are really on top of things.

Using these simple rules, you can begin to identify project problems quickly and accurately and avoid the surprises that are otherwise all too common. Once the system boosts your efficiency at the office, who knows, you may want to deploy it for your household chores as well.