LEADERSHIP

PROCESS PARALYSIS

Methodologies and processes are in place to serve you—not the other way around.

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Project management methodologies can be an emotional topic among project stakeholders. Consider the following question: Do you believe the project management methodologies and processes promoted in your organization are too bureaucratic, inefficient, inflexible and often don't yield a sufficient ROI? I've asked this question to thousands of people, and somewhere between one-half and two-thirds have responded "yes."

Ouch! What's a leader to do? Here are some common causes of process paralysis—and ways to fix them:

Bureaucratic and Inefficient Methodologies

Structure and discipline on a project is a good thing. But no project management methodology satisfies all the needs of all its users. Project managers must tailor the methodology to fit the project's business needs. Be careful, however, to understand the bigger picture. Look beyond your immediate interests to see how what you dismiss as a "bureaucratic" process may benefit other areas of the organization.

If you can't deviate from the methodology without proper approval, then make your case. Play by the rules, but be persistent if you believe you have a better way that will benefit the business.

Incomplete Methodology

If a specific process you need hasn't been well-defined or implemented, one option is to go to the perceived owner of the problem and try to convince him or her of your needs. The goal is to obtain a commitment to remedy the problem within an acceptable time period. If this person doesn't cooperate, you can then escalate the issue to higher levels of leadership. If this fails, you may have to be creative and devise a solution that satisfies your business needs.

New Methodology

The question of whether to implement new methodologies in phases or all at once is difficult to answer without addressing the urgency of the problems they're intended to fix. However, if weak or no methodologies are currently in place, an organization will likely benefit from phased improvements as a starting point.

Yet, if you discover a better way to do something on your project, you shouldn't necessarily apply the new process or technique immediately. The implementation depends on the overall ROI of applying the idea—the pain versus the gain. If the project plan needs to be reworked at a cost of two weeks, yet the overall benefit appears to save only one week, then the idea probably isn't worth implementing. Don't forget that small, incremental improvements can have a measurable long-term benefit on all aspects of a project—not just scope, schedules and costs, but also quality, morale and communications.

Resistive Team Members

What should you do with team members who refuse to follow defined methodologies? If the project members have valid reasons for their positions, you should work to satisfy their interests. If you don't support the members' position, then try to find middle ground acceptable to all parties. If that's not possible, assert your position as the project manager. In the rare case where one or more members still refuse to adopt the appropriate methodologies, escalate the issue until it's resolved.

Accountability

The project manager is responsible for ensuring an effective methodology is in place. Not management. Not the head of the project management office. Although they share some accountability, the buck stops with the project manager.

Project management is about helping the enterprise be successful. As a leader, you're expected to use good business judgment as process and methodology issues are encountered. PM

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