

Project Management and Me: 10 Lessons that Made Me Better

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OGL 320 – Foundations of Project Management

This semester was the first time that I got a chance to delve into the finer details of project management and project planning. While I was never so naive as to believe that project management was an uncomplicated process, I had never considered just how intricate the distinct phases of a project's life can be. One of the first things that I learned in this course is that there is no "first among equals" when it comes to project phases; each phase commands an attention to detail and consideration, and each phase is equally important.

One of the first resources I appreciated in this course was *10 Project Management Lessons from the Titanic Disaster*. The reason that this article spoke to me is that it was a sort of outline for the course laid out in layman's terms. I did not look at it as such at the time, but it really is a comprehensive guide to project planning. I would like to use the same 10 points from *10 Project Management Lessons...* to outline the lessons I learned in OGL 320 this semester.

1. "You need to know what you're measuring." (Sun, 2012)

This relates to having an unobstructed vision and obtainable goals, and it is a critical part of project planning. Teams function optimally when they understand project objectives and the

course that best helps achieve those objectives. Setting up obtainable project milestones to keep the team on track helps everyone to confidently assess where they are in terms of success.

2. “Assumptions can kill you.” (Sun, 2012)

Communication is important, and assuming everyone on the team has the same information is a mistake. One way of looking at communication in teams is that “Communication is the vehicle through which leaders and followers create, nurture, and sustain useful exchanges.” (Northouse, 2022) Sponsors, stakeholders, and project team members should all be aware of who the stakeholders are and what their roles in the project will be. One way of starting this communication process is by making sure a launch meeting is scheduled with all stakeholders, including sponsors. Some team members may have already had informal communication, “But those informal get-togethers are no substitute for a face-to-face meeting attended by all members, the sponsor, key stakeholders, and, if appropriate, the highest-ranking official of the organization.” (Managing Projects Large and Small, 2004)

3. “Distractions are Dangerous.” (Sun, 2012)

Losing sight of the project goals because the team members are distracted by other projects or personal goals can lead to failure. When pulling team members from multiple departments for large projects you face a dilemma: how does one distribute their time between their regularly expected work and their contributions to group efforts? Some distractions may be unavoidable but outside pressures and obligations should be eliminated when possible. Team leaders should also set group norms that minimize unnecessary socializing without hindering a productive work environment.

4. “Little things add up.” (Sun, 2012)

When we allow little problems to slide continuously, they will eventually turn into large, more unmanageable problems. While team member absences, vendor delays, and scheduling conflicts may all be manageable issues on their own, when stacked on top of one another they become a bigger issue. Before you know it, your project may be weeks behind.

5. “Stakeholders should be kept informed.” (Sun, 2012)

Transparency with stakeholders is key to the success and integrity of the project. “Stakeholders include all members of the project team as well as all interested entities that are internal or external to the organization. The project team identifies internal and external, positive and negative, and performing and advising stakeholders in order to determine the project requirements and the expectations of all the parties involved.” (Project Management Institute, 2013) Even when the news is bleak, stakeholders have a right to be informed of what is going on with the project. Failure to educate stakeholders of the problems projects face in a timely fashion will breed mistrust and resentment among team members. Though some conversations may be difficult to have, they are even more imperative to address.

6. “Other people’s perspectives matter.”

There is no “I” in team, and there are often many perspectives that can contribute to a positive outcome. The team leader’s way is not always the only “right way”. Furthermore, not listening to sponsor perspectives can create conflict as the project life cycle advances. It is also important to communicate with people in a way that they can understand. For example, if you have an expertise in engineering you may want to simplify technical terms when communicating with sponsors who lack specific engineering knowledge. Understanding the perspectives of team members is important when adapting communication methods to suit the individual’s needs.

7. “Moving targets can hurt you.” (Sun, 2012)

Once a project is underway, changing the measurable objectives and project requirements can greatly impact the project scope. Keeping a project on track with only the utmost necessary changes to the project plan is an integral part of project management.

8. “Traceability is essential.” (Sun, 2012)

Communication such as project meeting minutes, notification of process changes, etc. should be documented for accuracy and traceability. Furthermore, project requirements should be traceable to strategic objectives.

9. “Methodology is more important than technology.” (Sun, 2012)

Having the newest and most advanced technology is of little use if it confuses team members and creates frustration. The emphasis on team methods should be comprehensive and thorough. A solid plan is what matters, not the technology used to communicate the plan.

10. “Documentation may have lasting benefits.” (Sun, 2012)

A team retrospective and a project analysis should be considered essential processes in the closing phase of projects. Companies can learn much from past projects concerning what worked and what did not and can use those lessons when tackling future projects.

Part 2: Introspective

I have found many lessons that are applicable to my situation as a shift supervisor and barista trainer at Starbucks. One of the most useful subjects that we covered was the section on adaptive management. I recognize that as a team leader, I need to think on my feet and be prepared to adapt to the situation at hand when facing new challenges. Many unforeseen problems arise during the phases of a project’s life cycle, and it is imperative to be flexible and find where adjustments can and cannot be made.

Another important part of project management that has been useful as a team leader is recognizing my own strengths and weaknesses and learning to build a team that complements what I am bringing to the table. I know that I am charismatic and extroverted, and that my team feels comfortable approaching me when they need an empathetic ear or advice. Unfortunately, I often find that I need more assistance when it comes to technical skills and tasks that require. Crunching numbers and understanding statistics is not my strong suit, and thus I should make sure that I balance my teams with members that compensate for the capabilities that I lack.

The final lesson that I can use in any leadership position that is most significant to my line of work is that continuous learning is a necessity. Though it is wise to build a team that compliments my weaknesses, it is not a substitution for seeking out resources to improve on my technical skills. Learning should be on-going and integral to growing as a manager. There will never be a point with today's advancing technology where there is no more room for improvement. I can and should always strive to be more, do better, and help others advance; there is always room for improvement.

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