

Practical Project Management – Tips and Traps

Part Five – Making Project Management Work – Tips & Traps

Note: This summer, I celebrated my 40th anniversary of project management involvement with the release of my 2nd book: *“Practical Project Management: Tips, Tactics, and Tools”* by *Harvey A. Levine, John Wiley & Sons, 2002*. Scattered throughout this text are some hundred or so Tips and Traps that are based on my experiences during these four decades of project management practice.

This is the fifth of a series of articles built around these tips and traps statements. It captures the essence of almost 400 pages of practical project management advice, in just a few short articles. Of course, you are invited to delve deeper into the material at a later time. Also, you will find selected excerpts of the book’s chapters on this website as separate papers.

Training

TIP – Training-Tailored to the user

Training should be designed to meet the specific needs of the trainee. This will require multi-faceted, multi-level training sessions, aimed at a target audience. The project management system should be designed to recognize the role of each user, especially in regard to input forms, output forms and included data. The training sessions should pick up on these specifics and show how the system is designed for each user in the audience, and how it will be used by each. (Ch. 13-1)

TRAP – No training = Failure

Here is something that I can state with absolute certainty. It is entirely impossible to implement a computer-based project management capability without also implementing a broad, multi-level training program. Even if the computer plays a small role in your project management process, an understanding of the principles of project management and the local practices that have been put in place cannot be taken for granted. A formal training effort is required to prevent failure of the project management initiative. (Ch. 13-1)

Making Project Communication Work:

TIP – Poor communication = Failure

When properly handled, good, effective, timely, appropriate communication can have an important role in achieving project success. On the other hand, poor, haphazard, incomplete, untimely and misdirected communication is a recipe for project failure. (Ch. 13-2)

TRAP – Communication-Tailored to the target audience

There is a tendency to employ a “one-size-fits-all” philosophy when designing input screens and reporting formats. This will encourage resistance to support of the system by the target users, and cannot be justified in light of the capabilities of today’s PM tools. (Ch. 13-2)

Why Project Management Implementation Programs Fail

TRAP – There's no such thing as a free lunch

The failures in implementing PM can be traced back to this simple misconception: that we can take shortcuts with PM -- that we can treat it casually and unprofessionally -- and still have it work. (Ch. 13-3)

TRAP – Organizations must allow for flexibility

Rigid organizational structures can prevent the firm from a prompt and appropriate response to a crisis or critical deadline. All organizations must be able to establish temporary teams or task forces to respond to such situations. (Ch. 13-4)

Stimulating Initiative and Innovation: The Psychological Contract

TRAP – Three things that stifle initiative and innovation

Initiative and innovation are often stifled by organizational segmentation, the absence of trust, and the unwillingness to take risks. When any of these three conditions exist, it is difficult for talented individuals to flourish and to contribute all that they are capable of. This is a lose-lose situation, as the individuals feel frustrated and unappreciated and the firm fails to obtain the full measure of each individual's potential contribution. (Ch. 13-5)

TIP – Try this! The Psychological Contract

Leaders, whether formal managers or temporary leaders or even those to which we voluntarily grant authority, who offer to negotiate a Psychological Contract, stand the best chance of providing a stimulating environment for all involved. (Ch. 13-5)

TIP – Access to the best people

In the 21st century, maintaining a cadre of knowledgeable, skilled, motivated, workers will be a major component of the true assets of a company. Being able to pull workers from this store, based on matching skills and assignment preferences to the need, will be of paramount importance to success. (Ch. 13-5)

Shared Rewards

TRAP – Shared responsibility = shared rewards

In the traditional system, we give individuals responsibility and a list of expectations. We then measure performance and distribute rewards. We expect the rewards to motivate performance. When there is shared responsibility and expectations, such as may exist in the projects environment, we often maintain the individual measurement and rewards system. This promotes individual performance over team performance. (Ch. 13-6)

TRAP – Shared rewards can still recognize the individual

The reward system, even when designed to recognize the accomplishment of teams, must never forget that each member of the team is an individual. Each person requires recognition as an individual as well as a team member, and each person will have reward needs based on that person's specific needs and expectations. While the shared rewards should recognize shared results, they need not be cookie-cutter rewards, but rather provide for equal rewards based on individual preferences. (Ch. 13-6)

Editor's note: The Tips & Traps presented in this five-part series come from Mr. Levine's book: "Practical Project Management, Tips, Tricks, and Tools". For your information, here is the Table of Contents for that book.

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Mr. Levine is the leading consultant to the project management software industry and is recognized as the leading expert in tools for project management. He has been Adjunct Professor of Project Management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Boston University. He has conducted project management public seminars for ASCE, AMA, IBM, and PMI.

Mr. Levine is the author of the book "Project Management using Microcomputers" and has published extensively in other books, periodicals, and videos. Mr. Levine is past president of the Project Management Institute and the recipient of PMI's 1989 Distinguished Contribution to Project Management award. He was recently elected a Fellow of PMI.

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