

Project Management Manifesto Revisited

PrezSez 04-2009, by Dr. Lew Ireland, *asapm* President

There is a much to be learned from the current economic situation -- once all the facts are visible. Slowly the facts, or partial information, emerge in the form of catastrophic failure of an organization because of mismanagement – or in some instances there may be fraud involved. The US Government’s approach to solving the many problems, regardless of any understanding of the cause of the problems, is to throw money at the organizations. “Strings” are applied to the expenditure of this money after the fact and after apparent abuses are reported in the news media – not through any due diligence on the part of Congress or the current Administration.

The same people in leadership positions who brought the financial situation to the brink of disaster are asked to “fix the problem.” To paraphrase Albert Einstein, “the same type of thinking that got us into this problem is not the type of thinking that will get us out of it.” Financial institutions and insurance institutions seem to be conducting business as usual with lavish outings and significantly high bonuses after receiving a “loan” from the US taxpayer. It appears that their leadership is still thinking in the same way that got them into this mess.

The PM Manifesto, endorsed by *asapm* and available at <http://www.pmmanifesto.net>, calls for:

1. systematic use of project management practices to select, plan, and track projects,
2. selection of experienced, responsible project leaders to be accountable to the American public for project results, and
3. selection of project sponsors at all levels of government to ensure accountability at every level.

While the PM Manifesto aims for better productivity through better practices, there is no indication that this is being done or will be done by those organizations struggling to survive financial problems. Until the organizations struggling with their financial problems start thinking differently and quit living in denial, there will be little change to practices whether they be project management or other. Recognition and acceptance of the problem is the first step to correcting the course to success.

The current situation provides an opportunity to rethink where is the US going and where is the wasteful spending that is draining dollars from the taxpayer. Using the PM Manifesto as a start point, where can one ensure the systematic use of solid project management practices? Not all organizations are familiar with project management nor do all organizations have competent project managers. There is an opportunity here to work with organizations to establish project management practices that increase their productivity and reduce waste. Project managers need to be evaluated to ensure they are competent or are working on gaining competence. A program that builds on organizational competence would be a start in the right direction.

Secondly, knowing what a competent and experienced project leader is, rather than a likable person, can be critical to the selection and assignment to projects. A competent leader must have the behavioral skills as well as the technical skills to be considered the best candidate as a project manager. Understanding the technology and the technical side of project management is not enough to give the best chance at delivering a successful project. The “soft part” of managing a project is typically the most difficult and poses the most challenges to any project, large or small.

Thirdly, selection of project sponsors is not a trivial matter that can be treated lightly. Project sponsors must have competence in linking the project to the strategic plan. This takes a different set of skills and knowledge than a project manager. These skills and knowledge, coupled with a positive attitude, ensure the project is progressing as planned and changed when needed to meet the strategic goals. The project sponsor should be the second person to know when a project is in trouble – immediately following the project manager. This entails either recommending corrective actions or termination of the project.

The PM Manifesto is a start in the right direction. Significant gains can be made if an organization follows the aims, but first the leadership must recognize there is a problem with the manner in which work is conducted and the competence levels of the staff. The entire organization must be motivated to improve work conditions and accept change. New practices must replace old practices, and every level within the organization needs to be willing to learn new ways of doing work.

Like the old saying, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Changes to practices must be continuous until there is little to gain. Training of staff and managers in the practice of project management is necessary to break old habits and instill the best practices known. Every organization should be a competent project practitioner to some degree, whether a user of project management to implement strategy or dealing with another organization delivering products and services by means of project management.

About the Author

Lew Ireland, Ph.D.
600 Dunbar Cave Road
Clarksville, TN 37043
Tel: 931.647.7373



Lew Ireland is an Executive Project Management Consultant based in Tennessee and serving both US and international clients. He has worked with clients to establish their project management systems to ensure they are supportive of the organizations’ respective goals. He is experienced in all phases of project management that include planning, scheduling, project office implementation, project maturity modeling, and project assessment.

Lew has authored or co-authored project management books and articles for professional journals. He is a continual contributor to the *American Society for the Advancement of Project Management*, regularly writing short articles for our website.

Lew has a history of serving for nearly 25 years in volunteer positions to advance project management. He is past President and Chair of the Project Management Institute and has served in various positions within the Institute. He has been recognized by the Institute for his contributions by the Distinguished Contribution Award, Person of the Year, and elected a Fellow of the Institute.

He serves as President of the *American Society for the Advancement of Project Management* (asapm), a not-for-profit professional society dedicated to more effective project management practices.