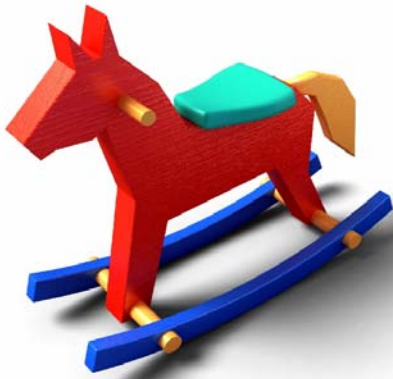


Project or Hobby?

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Some 20 plus years ago the question was posed: “Is this a project or is it a hobby?” The work seemed to take on the characteristics of a hobby more than that of a professional effort to convert resources into a future benefit for the customer. The project appeared to have more benefits for the project manager than for a customer. The traditional cost, schedule, and technical performance measures were rather fuzzy – if defined at all.

To protect the guilty, the organization shall not be identified and the project shall remain nameless. Needless to say, the project did not provide more value than the resources consumed. The closeout on the project was accomplished only because the funds were consumed and no more funding could be obtained.



What is the difference between a project and a hobby? Can we compare the two to some level of distinction and then be able to differentiate between a project and a hobby? Using the traditional parameters of projects, I will contrast where the characteristics differ so one may recognize when a project turns into a hobby.

Projects and hobbies are similar in that they entail

- Technical performance features to satisfy a customer.
- Schedule to meet expectations for delivery.
- Cost/price that the work will require.
- Risk in failing to meet customer expectations.
- Organization to accomplish the work.

Technical performance features are the fundamental requirements for a project in that the form, fit, and function characteristics must meet the needs of the customer to be successful. The expectations of the customer – and it is a customer external to the project organization – need to be met without compromise. A hobby, on the other hand, has the builder as the customer or one’s self as the customer. The technical performance features may change frequently based on whims of the builder.

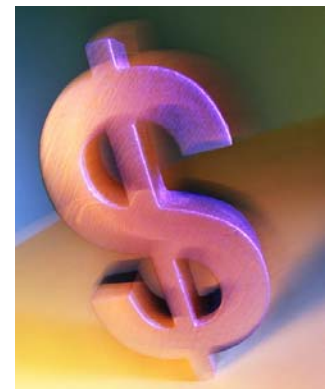
Hobbies typically have no written specifications like those required of a project.



Schedule performance for a project is based on the schedule objective in the project plan. The schedule objective is defined as a delivery date and is measured by units of effort and time. In projects the delivery date often changes based on changes to the product

design or discovered work. In a hobby, there is no formal delivery objective – only something in the future. Delivery dates are typically determined when there is sufficient time to work on the hobby after other commitments such as real work or spousal urging.

Cost for a project should be determined through a formal process that becomes a budget, or a time-phased expenditure plan. The cost objective can change because of increased or decreased scope or discovered work. Changes to the project cost is typically a formal process that requires approval of senior managers and perhaps the customer.



On the other hand, hobby costs are seldom projected into the future and surely not documented. Hobby expenditures are more often the result of available, disposable income that the spouse may not be aware of the expense.

Risk in a project is compared to the project's objectives. Risk may be assessed formally and documented to determine the optimum method of avoiding or mitigating risk.

A risk management plan may be used to prosecute the risks through a concerted effort. A hobby, however, probably has no formal planning accomplished, but the person probably deals with the consequence of risk events. No risk is too great to halt the hobby in advance – it is only when the risk exceeds available time, money, or resources that work is brought to an abrupt halt.



Customers of projects must be identified and managed to ensure project success. These customers are typically defined in the project charter along with their general requirements.

Customer satisfaction is gained primarily through the delivery of products. In the hobby the situation is entirely different where the “customer” is the hobby worker and “customer satisfaction” is achieved through various means. The satisfaction in the hobby may be achieved through the doing more than the delivery. The product of the hobby may also change to meet new goals or imposed limitations.

Organizational design to accomplish the project work focuses on the amount of work, the skills required to accomplish the work, and the promised delivery date for the product. While there are numerous variations of the project organization, the balance between many resources drives the design.

Not so with the hobby – it relies wholly on the single person and perhaps some volunteers for part-time help. The skills available are limited to one individual's competence in the work to be accomplished and perhaps some volunteers.

Over the past 20 years, I have many times asked myself the question: “Is this a project or a hobby?” Too frequently the characteristics of a hobby often creep into projects and the value created by the project is considerably less than it would be without the “hobby characteristics.” Resources are wasted through misdirected efforts in a hobby shop environment where the results satisfy the performers more than the customer.

Separate your projects from your hobbies and treat each with the proper care. For projects, remember the mission and who is the external customer that must be satisfied with the product of the project. For hobbies, relax and enjoy the work effort that you do for yourself – remember you are the customer of the hobby's product. If you are the project leader remind your team of the need to separate the project characteristics from the hobby characteristics. Have fun in both the projects and hobbies, but never mix the two.