

Why to manage projects?

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Today many executives ask themselves about the real value and applicability of the so called “project management!” in their companies. If you have already heard about it in some lecture or if you cannot stand hearing your old friend and fan of this idea talking about this subject, you have already asked yourself the same thing: up to what extent it is worth investing your time and money to guarantee a good project management? This same question was made and repeated a lot of times for many people involved in several complex undertakings. From the preparation of a new marketing campaign to the building of a power plant, from a new cash flow system to man going to the moon. Where did everything start? Why is this fever called project management being heard and preached everywhere nowadays?

For a better understanding where everything started it is necessary to go back a little bit in time. Since the pyramid times, problems and concepts regarding to managing projects were heard. The term “work” was scientifically defined by Frederick Taylor (1876-1915), and he was the first person to consider it as a kind of process design. However, just after war the techniques of managing projects were defined and classified in a way to be considered as a discipline. The greater catalizer of this happening was the United States Department of Defense that through initiatives as the Polaris program (1957-58), levered the PERT tools (Program Evaluation and Review Technique) and some other terms today used, as the famous war room, the follow-up project room. Afterwards, military, construction, automotive, film making and aerospace fields were also greater sponsorships to grow this discipline, quickly realizing how much they could be benefiting themselves through this approach. Managing multidisciplinary teams and accomplishing unique objectives in a limited period of time and with resource constraints could seem more feasible. Everyday new studies and techniques arise that support knowledge areas involved in managing projects. Concepts as “projectized” companies, PMO (Project Management Office), powerful planning and control software and management methodologies are increasingly present in our daily activities.

As everything in life, this movement hasn't happened at random. It is necessary to observe the world's environment where we live today to understand the meaning of such a revolution. Nothing else is sure to say than saying that nothing else is sure. The companies and its professionals go through continuous change processes to develop according to the ways that the world leads. Even if there are different points of view we cannot ignore the globalization effects, the technology that surrounds us, the society's desires to which we belong to and, mainly the more and more impatient, intolerant and demanding client that we are. The thoughts referring to quality have been developed since Deming, Crosby and Juran. The trend is that it turns even into commodity in a world where more and more experience provided by products and services has become the key of satisfaction. But this development is not trivial. It is necessary to be able to adapt, sometimes it is necessary to change literally the modus operandi and the way of thinking to be able to evolve. At every new step there is a change, and at every change, there is a new project.

We reached the core question. If the development of your department, division or company depends on projects, it is not more than fair and reasonable to perform them with excellence. Actually, you do not manage projects only by managing. What is really expected is an improvement of the performance. Top managers and clients do not like surprises. Due to this, maybe another way to define project management is as an insurance policy. Planning and control are integrant pieces of the game and, by definition, reduce the risks involved in this environment of constant change.

Now take our dear Brazil as an example. If we suppose that every risk bears itself an associate opportunity, which country better than ours can change constraints and difficulties into positive results? This is the goal to have projects well managed! To reduce uncertainties, meet the internal and external customer satisfaction and be unhurt at the end of the project. And by being unhurt

does not mean only to finish on time, within budget and according to the specifications. There is more under this successful definition. First of all, a project is composed of persons. To make people feel better and grow along the project aiming a common target it is a successful sign. We all are aware of the pains and delights embedded in managing people. Multiply this by a temporary environment as in a project and we will see the importance of knowledge and experience that are necessary to a project manager. Another sign is the stored learning for future projects, the lessons learned. It makes no sense to make mistakes twice.

Some authors say that managing projects is actually managing problems all the time. Maybe they are right. The fact is that it does not matter the work area in your company (we can exceed this thought even in personal projects) it is necessary to adapt processes, to train people, to make tools available and, if necessary, to make all efforts to increase the chances. Even so it is not guaranteed. Putting fiction and fantasy away, the success in project does not happen in a sleight-of-hand. But one thing is for sure: the worst thing would be never try.