



# Project Management – What's the Real Deal?

By Kevin Morris, RCDD

Over the past few decades the use of Project Management has grown at a phenomenal rate. It is being used by both small and large companies to be more efficient, more profitable, more competitive and more in line with the stakeholders' needs. In today's highly competitive markets you cannot always raise your prices. So how do you become more profitable with the work you have if you cannot raise your prices? The answer may be becoming more efficient in your tools and processes, which will allow the company to remain competitively priced while raising profitability by meeting budgets.

## DEFINING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

So, what is Project Management and how can organizations utilize it to accomplish their goals? First, let me ask if this sounds familiar. The project manager says, "Here's 6,000 feet of Category 5e cable, 40 jacks 40 faceplates, one patch panel, cable ties and tape. You need to have this done by Friday. Call me if you need anything." Does this sound familiar? Maybe there is a little more to it than that, but you get the drift. Is this project management? I guess the first thing we should decide is if this is truly a project and, if so, how could it be managed better? According to PMI (Project Management Institute) as defined in the Third Edition of the PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) Guide, a "project" is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. So the answer then is, "yes." This is a project because it has a definite end and has a unique result. That means that most cabling installations meet the criteria of a project.

## PROJECT MANAGER/PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Let's define what a project manager is and what his/her role is. Referring to the same source (the PMBOK), it defines a project manager as the person assigned by the performing organization to achieve the project objectives. The project objectives are sometimes referred to as the "triple constraint." The triple constraint being time, scope, budget and I like to add a couple more of risk and customer satisfaction. We have already mentioned that becoming more efficient in our processes will lead to more profitability, but how do we accomplish this? The answer is an interrelated group of processes and procedures established to produce schedules, budgets, scope definition and deliverables, while reducing risk. There have been entire books written on this subject and we do not have the space to discuss this in its entirety, therefore, I will concentrate on a basic process that you can actually find templates for on the Internet and in programs, such as Excel® and Project. The Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) is, in my opinion and many others, the single most important tool/process a project manager can utilize to break the project into smaller more manageable pieces that can be scheduled, budgeted, analyzed for risks, and tracked for results. The WBS is the nucleus of information for the project. With all of this information coming from this one source you can understand why utilizing this simple to implement tool/process could and would make your projects more profitable. Let's go back to our previous example. If we break the project down into pieces:

- There are five hours to establish the ceiling support system;

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- 35 hours to rough in the cable;
- Seven hours to terminate and test the cables;
- Two hours to document the deliverables and turn over the project to the end user.

Would that give the technician a better framework to work from? This very basic breakdown has given the technician the expectations concerning the deliverables of the project and the schedule they must, and have, agreed to meet. How powerful is that? This is a very simple example used to demonstrate how powerful a WBS can be. Imagine how useful a WBS would be on a project containing thousands of hours, with numerous tasks all having to be scheduled at the appropriate times to meet scope, time, budgets and customer satisfaction.

The example above is just the beginning of a WBS. Further breakdown to the work package level would be necessary. As you can see it is a series of boxes each one representing pieces of work that gradually flows down to more manageable work pieces. By manageable if you are considering thousands of hours you might consider one hundred sixty hour increments more manageable. There is no set rule for this. It comes down to what is considered a manageable piece of work. As you can see, our example somewhat resembles a corporate organizational chart but only in appearance. The WBS is built with both customer deliverables and the perform-

ing organizations deliverables in mind. Creating the Work Breakdown Structure is the process of subdividing these deliverables from large pieces into smaller more manageable pieces. The bottom layer and most decomposed piece of the WBS is the Work Package. The Work Package is the final breakdown when it is decided to be a manageable piece of work. The Work Packages are then compiled into a summary document called the WBS Dictionary. This is a reference point for the contents of each Work Package.

The contents of each Work Package should include but are not limited to:

1. A unique Numerical Identifier
2. Statement of Work
3. Schedule Milestones
4. Contract Information
5. Quality Requirements
6. Responsible Party
7. Budget
8. Technical Information
9. Deliverables

You are not limited to what types of information to include. Keep in mind during the creation of your WBS that document is unique to that project and that if two people were creating a WBS for the same project they would more than likely be different in structure. The good news about this is that once you have created one you can use it as a template for future products with relat-

ed deliverables; in our case Information Transport Systems (ITS).

### IN THE END

We have come back to the main question that was asked at the beginning of the article. How can your company become more profitable and maintain competitively priced? The answer to that question may lie in the way you manage your projects. A new approach to Project Management incorporating proven tools and processes might be the key to improving profits, deliverables, scheduling, customer satisfaction and this is just to name some of the obvious benefits. As the field of Project Management grows, so does the information and tools available. There are entire organizations dedicated to the growth and standardization of tools, techniques and processes promoting the project management field, such as, the Project Management Institute (PMI). Just like the RCDD certification in the Information Transport Systems industry there are certifications that signify an individual's competency in the field of Project Management. If you are in the role of Project Manager at your company, explore the numerous benefits that formal training in the profession of project management can bring to you and the company you work for. It could just change your career. ■

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### WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE

