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Project Management 2.0: Collaborative Communications

by Barbara Lancaster and Wedge Greene

Projects Gone Bad

According to the Standish Group, great strides have been made in delivering successful projects (defined as those that meet their time, budget and scope expectations). Since their seminal study of the success of IT projects – the 1994 Chaos Report– the rate of successful projects has doubled! Tempering this great news is the sobering fact that the success number used to be about 16% and we've now made it all the way up to *35%.*

Similarly, projects that are judged as partial successes are now nudging 50%, up from the 34% reported fourteen years ago. Projects deemed total failures improved from a dismal 31% in 1996 to 19% in 2006. While this is undoubtedly progress, it is very worrisome that the 2006 results are almost identical to those reported by the same group in 2003. The industry managed to make significant improvement between 1994 and 2003, but seems to have stalled since then.

Furthermore, time over runs have increased, up from 63% in the year 2000, to 82% in 2006. Slashing functionality to get closer to the schedule and budget

unfortunately is also gaining in popularity, with only 52% of the required features and functions making it to production in 2006, compared to 67% in the year 2000.

All of this means that some $145 billion is still spent annually on IT projects that fail to deliver the expected (and required) benefits. Real money at real risk, and in tight economic times, this cannot be perceived by anyone as a good thing.

Can we do better?

What can we do to accelerate the pace of improvement? How can we ensure more repeatable success? We need to do more to solve the continuing project killer: poor communications.

If there is a killer application in the Internet age, it is facilitated communications. This is at the core of the Web 2.0 World (W2W). The Web 2.0 revolution is all about empowering communication. Many new technical approaches combine to facilitate this. We can use some of it to improve "worker to worker" interaction and communication. Furthermore, we can improve on the "big picture"; gaining a fuller understanding of what is occurring. And we can monitor both management and workers to see what is happening and how their contributions fit together to move the project forward, and where nudging, prodding, or more serious escalation is required to get everyone back on track.

Two other factors figure largely in analyzing the differences between successful projects and the not-so-successful:

1. Assignment of sufficient resources to get all of the defined work done.
    - Collaboration early on the project planning cycle can ensure that all required tasks are identified and included in the initial request for project funding. Having a good gating process that allows sufficient time for each involved group to provide their input not only means a more accurate initial project view, it also helps generate buy-in and enthusiasm to participate.
2. Timely recognition of good work done by team members.

- It is well known that people who are rewarded in a timely fashion for their contributions are shown to work harder, increasing their own productivity and that of those around them. Surely, this must fall in the "common sense" book on effective human relationships, but in far flung project teams it has been especially difficult to do. Here again, the new collaboration tools make it much easier for the project manager to call out great work done – high quality, on time, and on budget.

What are these new tools that make it possible for humans to communicate more clearly, in a more timely manner, and with more enthusiasm? A wealth of new Communication Technologies has exploded onto the scene in the last ten years. Where none were deployed before 1998, people now have available:

- VoIP, driving down the cost of connecting large groups of geographically dispersed team members
- Instant Messaging, making it almost as easy to ask a quick question as standing by the water cooler
- Presence, knowing just who is and who isn't available to communicate with right now
- Universal messaging, making it easier to communicate across any number of devices
- Wiki's & Blogs
- Twitter & tailing (not just where you are but what you are doing)
- Social Networks
- Collaborative Workspaces, such as "Groove"
- My.shared.page personal portal
- Self subscription
- Auctions
- Preference voting
- Semantic Agents

Can we work these into the structure of project management, improving communications and cohesion of teams, multiplying productivity yet again, and increasing efficiency and satisfaction? If we can, maybe a few less billions of dollars will be at risk, and maybe the percentage of truly successful projects can grow more quickly. The answer does appear to be "yes," and many project managers are already making good use of these tools to run projects in a very much more open, collaborative, and participative manner. Improved communications? You bet.

Collaborative Documents

Project communication and organizational memory are also embodied in the documents that a project produces. Today we have available vast improvements in the technology of generating collaborative documents. Collaborative document technologies can and should be applied to projects. These include:

- Wiki's are internet/intranet resident documents that are "owned in common." As such, they can be deployed and owned in common by a project group. All the plans, notes, revisions, discoveries, reports, questions, and documentation can be established as pages in a shared wiki. Everyone who has permission can edit the wiki. Editorial management can be maintained and changes overseen by management, after everyone contributes as they go. Wiki products are either open source or inexpensive. These provide a record of design and management of the project.
- Blogs, a.k.a. web logs or "we blog," are personal journals that anyone can access. These become personal records and personal answers to FAQs. They provide for lateral, indirect communication. They share knowledge and findings throughout the organization, particularly when coupled with the advanced search technology which can now be licensed for corporate use. They are "how the good and bad lessons" are spread informally. They allow steam to be blown off, and they pinpoint to management where attention is needed. But mostly blogs provides a sense of empowerment and engagement, improving how team members feel about the project outcome. Individuals gain reputations outside their team as their knowledge merits, and have larger impacts throughout the whole organization/corporation, thereby increasing efficiency.
- Formal collaboration tools, such as Microsoft Groove, originated by Ray Ozzie. This converts the standard Microsoft desktop documents (word, excel, PowerPoint) into shared group documents.

Enhanced Personal Communications

It is now possible for everyone to stay connected to anytime, and anywhere (whether this is good or not is perhaps a matter of personal preference…). For project collaboration however, there is no doubt that tools such as Instant Messaging, global roaming, VoIP, and now Universal Messaging are essential for personal and business communications. Generally, these are one-to-one communication technologies, but each can be used in conference mode allowing many people to contribute to the stream of discussion. From a project point of view, record keeping is enhanced too: everything can be recorded, a huge improvement over typical meeting notes. IM conversations and VoIP calls can be recorded and stored, with very little expenditure of resources, for use later to review decision factors or confirm action items.

IM introduced not just a simpler, faster email substitute, but the ability to communicate presence. You now have a good guess about who is available before trying to contact them. Even more useful may be Twitter. In addition to presence, Twitter and other status indicators identify not just who is on line, but how receptive each person is to interruption, and even what each person is working on. Personal feelings can be communicated and tracked too.

Collaborative Workspaces, such as Groove or open source cores based on Javaspace, provide both a central recording repository for these methods of communication as well as a mechanism for project organization. Each member connects to the common workspace via a queue of communication that synchronizes their time-space to the "experience" of the group as they move off and

on network. People are kept current and everyone present has the same view of the project, its outputs, and documents. Utilities running in the collaborative workspace can provide a common personal platform for the project and a common dashboard of project progress. Additionally, many vendors of collaboration tools supply project templates designed for a collaborative work space. The various project views, resource needs, team makeup, and status, etc. are all mapped in the workspace and collaboratively updated. Collaborative workspaces enhance democratic teamwork, rather than relying only on the project manager to keep the tracking up to date.

People as knowledge networks

Social networks: Self-organizing structures, they include private corporate deployments of technology found in MySpace, Facebook, and similar network products. These, essentially, invert the Groove collaborative space. Instead of all communicating to the common center, all communicate to their social network, and record on a private-but-shared portal. Social network pages act like a combination of shared blog and collaborative repository. They usually do not support collaborative document editing, but can provide a cork-board place for everyone to keep up to date on information and post their findings. These pages can be closed, viewable and usable only by the group, and thereby become a collaborative scratchpad, or they can be open and allow the "pool of talent" to self subscribe to a project. And they can market the project to others, either inside the corporation or outside, depending on security settings. Their value in the communications network is to supplement and perhaps replace direct communications that strictly follow the hierarchy of command. We have just begun to scratch the surface of usefulness for social network pages and the social networks behind them.

Reputation Networks: One recent enhancement to social network pages is "Reputation Networks." This technology builds on the "recommendations" feature of Linked-In and the seller-buyer evaluations of eBay. Reputation Networks include a mash-up of recommendations, performance, assessment of the breadth and depth of your network, and wraps it all up in voting technology. It can capture:

- How well you have performed historically
- Who you are connected to, and what they think of you
- Ratings that are continuously calculated and always up-to-date

It is easy to see how these can enhance productivity by sharing clearly how other team members and members of the organization view their fellows. It helps identify who your real experts and star performers are. When the networks are allowed to extend beyond corporate intranets, management can also evaluate the industry reputation of their star performers. Of course, it becomes easier to see where the problem performers are, too….

We can also use these tools to automatically and continuously score vendors. Reputation networks could be created to enable teams and management to participate. This will give a chance for all the customers to score a supplier in public, where all can see. This seems to work quite well for eBay users. Executives must, however, be able to set the conditions required to ensure that vested interests cannot trump institutional interests. For these reputation networks to work, everyone must tell everyone (internal and competition) who does well and who does poorly.

Reputation tools, therefore, may not be ready just yet for use as practical tools within a corporation. The corporation and project leads must be able to set the policy and criteria for these reputation evaluations, since score cards are good but not as a means of settling personal disputes and grudges. It is not clear that corporate policies can be applied to this crop of reputation products, but no doubt, they will be available in the next generation.

Internet bidding technologies can also be adapted for telecom supply chains. We all know too well what a nightmare the Request for Proposal (RFP) and response has become. Instead, consider putting projects out to bid on a closed (or even open) supply chain network. Scoring can be a combination of price for each requirement feature, the completeness of coverage of features, and the scores pulled from the reputation networks. Like an eBay buyer, you can see the bidders that struggle to deliver, or those whose scores indicate a propensity to be late and over budget. We can all see the value of this, but actually establishing such supply chain networks will be a trans-organizational challenge - Perhaps another task for the TMF Supply Chain group.

This approach can, however, be used internally with immediate results. We talked about replacing departments with a pool of labor. Add to this the internal selling of projects and the bidding for manpower and resources. Using eBay-like technology, project organizers will offer their projects for sale to the team members who will bid to join; or team organizers could bid for star resources. Internal "funny money" (as well as budget $) can be used to allocate resources. Funny money could be credits gained for successful completions of projects on time, in budget. By doing well, you gain points that allow you to bid for membership in interesting, high profile teams. Reputation networks help judge these bids. This would be a better way to allocate resources to projects and tasks.

Putting it all together

Each of these technologies can be applied individually to improve communication in

projects and enhance probability of success. It is hard to imagine a complete reengineering of projects to make use of all of these tools at once. However, we propose this aggregation of management approaches and technologies to achieve some real synergies, a collection we choose to call **Project Management 2.0**.

- Roll up from small groups to big groups to establish a vertically and horizontally nested organization.
- Drive lateral communication via social networks and self expression via blogs.
- Integrate everything within a collaborative workspace.
- Apply these techniques both at large and in small to establish a fractal organization.

This should get more projects launched and completed with a greater likelihood of success. But why stop at development projects? Project Management 2.0 (PM 2.0) is not just about development projects. It can be used for operational projects as well (yes, imagine the possibilities if Operations were to be viewed more like a series of projects…). By setting and applying consistent evaluation policies, Reputation Networks and Collaboration Spaces could be used to identify groups that are performing well, and those that aren't and why. Productivity would be enhanced as team members strive to achieve positive Reputation scores. Some operational processes that could be improved by applying PM 2.0 include:

- Provisioning
- Assurance (Revenue and Service)
- Contact Centers
- Sales
- Insert your favorite here…

And we need not stop at operational processes either. PM 2.0 can be applied throughout the Product Life Cycle. Fuse W2W project facilitation technology to the project's output "product" for complete life-cycle monitoring. The users of the product become a social network that feeds back information on:

- Why they use it.
- How they use it.
- How well it works.
- When and where problems occur.
- What enhancements they would like.

In the future, Web 3.0 technologies will mature enough to further enhance project management. Specifically even today, Semantic Agents can parse through the logs of communication, all the blogs and collaborative space documents to discover and flag "items of interest." Data and Voice Analytic products can analyze the information and tease out problem areas and discover local factors which are contributing to success and efficiency – and may be reproducible across the organization and other projects.

Up to this point, everything we suggest uses currently available technology. For the future, development work is needed on:

- Integration of CRM and BOSS systems into project-template enabled collaborative workspaces
- Integration and aggregation of information via semantics and Knowledge Management
- Automatic collection and analysis via near-real-time analytics.
- The development of semantic agent and personal-facilitation agent technology.

But…

Project Management is the engagement of the governance of the company to meet strategic business goals. Without a good business strategy, you will be managing projects for the wrong goals. Without a sound Enterprise Architecture, projects will undoubtedly cost too much and deliver too little. The bottom-up and self-organizing facilities of PM 2.0 will provide some auto-discovery and utilization of "organically generated" business goals that match the culture of the company and the ethics of the team members. The lateral communication and evaluation facilities of PM 2.0 should help recover from, and heal, specific and limited instances of mismanagement. Together, these greatly improve the chance for successful project outcomes.

But the supply chain itself must be re-engineered:

- You cannot accept terms and conditions for new contracts that stipulate you cannot tell anyone when something goes wrong. Amazing as it may seem, these are standard in the fine print of many contract templates.
- You must gain the support of your executives to find the vendor with the right combination of capability, price and reputation. When selected using other less objective criteria, you can expect bad things to happen to the schedule and the budget.
- Demand excellence and treat anyone who does not deliver it as a pirate.

As part of LTC International's vision of TeleRenaissance™, we provide action lists for the lean, agile, and modern service provider. We suggest the following action list for realizing PM 2.0:

1. Start with a fresh Strategic Vision.
2. Pick the right partner via bidding with $ and reputation points.
3. Create the right contract, one that specifies outcomes in measurable terms.
4. Build a project plan based on goals and components, not sequence governance.
5. Gather Informed, Collaborative Teams from the open pool.
6. Support them with expert Business Analysts who can accurately translate the business strategy into requirements, processes and test cases.

7. Link your organization in horizontally and vertically nested structures.
8. Govern and organize projects via collaborative workspaces.
9. Communicate inside and outside the group with new social network technologies.
10. Evaluate the outcomes in objective terms, reporting on each deliverable, and feed this into reputation networks.
11. Apply this across your supply chain and bind this into the whole Product Life Cycle for your products: developmental projects and operational processes.
12. Watch as your Reputation scores zoom up to reflect your success.

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