



ViewPoints

Projectability's monthly newsletter

August 2009 - Vol 1, Issue 8

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We live in an ever changing world where the pace of change seems to be accelerating all the time and speed of response is critical. Being able to respond to change in an informed and effective fashion is a key attribute of any successful Project Manager.

This book is all about putting strategy into practice and whilst it is not specifically a Project Management book it has had such a profound influence on the world of

Dear Reader,

Greetings,

Summer is well and truly upon us and many plans are coming to fruition in both work and home life. I am looking forward to a holiday this month, it has been in the diary for a while now and as it draws closer there is a growing sense of anticipation - I am going out to France to visit the site of a long term project.



This month I am providing suggestions for the format of a Project Highlight report - if you are answerable to senior management this report format can be invaluable in informing those who have a need to know of what they need to know in a concise and appropriate format.

Happy Planning - Dominic

The Project Highlight Report

In the last newsletter I focused upon the importance of Project Communications. The Project Highlight Report is likely to be one of the most significant and keenly studied communications you will have with your projects stakeholders.

Establishing a standardised format for this reporting can ensure that you get your message across in a concise and informative fashion.

So what should you include in a highlight report?

Perhaps the most important information should be an indication as to current status and trends for your project. Presenting this information in numeric terms may lack impact, presenting the information graphically will make it easy for its status to be evident. The most common form employed being Traffic Light Reporting or RAG (Red, Amber, Green) reporting - no prizes for guessing what the colours denote.

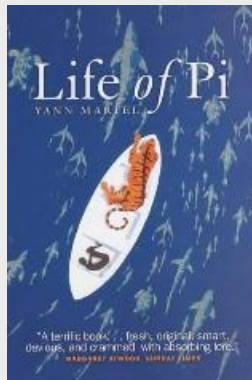
Trends also provide insight that may not be evident from "snapshot" information - if variances against targets are continuing to trend in an adverse direction it can be an early indication that things are drifting out of control. Being able to gauge how you are performing in the short term can also be a

commerce that being aware of its concepts will invariably help project managers appreciate how their projects are aligned to the strategic objectives of their organisation.

Projects tend to be the vehicle by which strategic change is realised. Appreciating exactly why something has to be done can be extremely helpful in persuading the nay sayers why it needs doing.

As the pace of change accelerates the need to achieve and maintain competitive advantages in the marketplace are likely to become ever more pressing.

Reading for Pleasure - Life of Pi



[Life of Pi](#)

This book had been on my bookshelf for ages, I brought it when it originally came out but never got around to reading it. That may sound like some of the project tasks you have been given in the past.

On completing another book I happened to find it and wondered why I had not gotten around to reading it.

I was soon immersed in this simple but fantastically

reliable indicator as to the effectiveness of your actions if you have had to take corrective steps in the recent past.

Forecasts at completion will show how close you are to achieving the original targets, if you are forecast to be outside the permitted tolerance or threshold you will need to alert the project board and advise them as to why and also provide recommendations as to how best to resolve the forecast problem - this can often be resisted by inexperienced project managers, "why should I report something that might not come to pass?" is the common refrain. A key part of effective project management is monitoring and control, senior management will not thank you if you present them with a "fait a complis" as you will have failed to both control your project and perhaps more importantly kept your project within the allocated time and budget mandated by the board at the outset.

Objectives

These should have been clearly defined and agreed at the outset, they should ideally remain unchanged for the duration of the project - if for whatever reason they have been changed since the last highlight report was issued it is useful to clearly record this at this point.

Current Headlines

In this section you can identify any factors beyond your control that might have an impact on your project. This can serve to illustrate how you are aware of the bigger picture and are prepared for risks that might manifest themselves, the watchwords in this instance being *"this should not happen but if it does..."*

Recent Achievements

Being able to report significant progress towards your objectives is always a comfort, it is a well known facet of the human condition that we take comfort from making progress. This section can also illustrate that you have achieved what you intended as far as actions for the next period from the previous highlight report are concerned.

Slippage and Remedial Plans

If you have slipped off target this section gives you the opportunity to spell out how you propose recovering the situation. You can explain how you come to be where you are and the steps you are taking to get back on track again, illustrating awareness and resolve.

Budget Changes

As with slippage you can explain any variances and your proposals to get back within the allocated budget.

Actions for next reporting period

In this section you should explain, ideally in bullet-points, what

entertaining tale. It is a bit like a modern fable. It has moments of great humour allied to passages that are truly reflective and that serve as an anti-dote to the rigours of modern life.

If you are looking to escape and immerse yourself in a simple well told story this book will not disappoint you.

Are you Linked In?



Are you a member of **Linked In**? If you are I would welcome the chance to **Link Up**.

Words of Wisdom

"If you're not failing every now and again, it's a sign you're not doing anything very innovative."

Woody Allen

Don't forget the Downloads!!



Don't forget there are numerous documents available to download **free of charge** on our Website - please feel free to take a look!

actions or outputs are planned in the period before the next Highlight Report is published.

Changes to Business Case

This requires you to look outside the project to see if changes outside the project could impact on the business case and ultimately the viability of the project.

Current Risks

Ideally you will be maintaining a log of risks relating to your project, in this section you should list out the most significant current risks relating to your project and their status.

Current Issues

In the same vein assuming you are maintaining an issues log you will need to list out the key current issues relating to the project and their status.

Inputs from the Project Board

If there are decisions required to vary budget, scope or the completion date for the project you will need to record them at this point, hopefully your reports will normally state *"no action required at this time"*.

A [sample Project Highlight Report format](#) is available to download from our website - feel free to help yourself.

MPUG



MPUG (Microsoft Project User Group) membership is worth considering if you are a regular user of the Microsoft Project Scheduling tool, not only do you receive regular fortnightly emails with useful hints and tips membership also offers insight into new developments with the worlds best selling project scheduling tool. Local chapter events also provide you with the opportunity to learn more at first hand and to exchange experiences with fellow users.

Project Conference



The [Microsoft Project Conference](#) takes place in Phoenix Arizona on 14th - 17th September. As there is a new release of Microsoft Project and Project Server due for next year this event will provide great insight into developments and future trends for the worlds best selling project scheduling tool.



Keyboard shortcuts are a useful way to improve your efficiency in using Microsoft Project. Each month we highlight one of the shortcuts available and the benefits of using it.

This months shortcut is specific to Project Professional when used in conjunction with Project Server. If you are not already using Project Server feel free to check our document library for [10 compelling reasons to adopt Project Server 2007](#).

CTRL+T displays the "Build Team from Enterprise" dialogue box, this feature provides a range of information relating to your Enterprise Resources including filtering, grouping, graphing, matching Generic Resources and viewing Resource Availability.

Being able to quickly locate and assess the availability and workload of key resources is a powerful feature of the Project Server solution, the "Build Team from Enterprise" dialogue box provides you with the means to assess the availability of people based upon their current commitments to all current projects.

A document with all the [Keyboard shortcuts in Microsoft Project](#) is available to download **free of charge** from our website.

Ask the Expert - identifying Critical Tasks in the schedule.



If you have a question you would like answering and are happy for others to benefit from the answer provided send an email to [ask the expert](#).

This months question as promised follows on from last months question about differentiating critical and non-critical tasks in the tabular display of the Gantt chart view.

The Gantt Chart Wizard, available from the Format menu, provides you with the option to change the appearance of your bar styles to differentiate between critical and non-critical tasks. The critical tasks will be displayed as RED bars whilst non-critical tasks will be displayed as blue bars. Once you have made the appropriate selections as presented by the Wizard simply click Format It to have the changes applied to your Gantt Chart display.

Once you have run the Gantt Chart Wizard use the Format, Bar Styles dialogue box to see how the Critical Bar style is defined, you may wish to create a custom view which incorporates this formatting by default.

Inspirations - Nikola Tesla The Man who Invented the 20th Century



Do you ever notice the custom logos employed by Google on their home page?

I was running a course the other day and in the course of exploring a topic had cause to visit their site. The logo as shown here looked interesting and on closer investigation (passing the cursor over the logo to reveal the information) we discovered that it was celebrating the birthday of Nikola Tesla.

It was one of those moments when people shrug and say who? I was then able to briefly explain to the group the story of this remarkable individual. I had read a book about him called ["The Man who Invented the 20th Century"](#) - that may sound like quite a claim but when you explore his story it is a title that is richly deserved.

Nikola Tesla was responsible for the invention of Alternating Current (AC), Wireless Radio, the Electric Motor, X-Rays, Remote Control, Cellular Technology and the basis of both lasers and radar - it is incredible and to an extent shaming that this genius is almost unknown.



His [life story](#) is both intriguing and frustrating for whilst he was without doubt a genius and an incredibly inventive character there were elements to his personality that ultimately prevented him from realising the fame and rewards that would normally have accompanied such endeavours.

He managed a long time feud with Thomas Eddison in the contest between AC and DC current which consumed his energies and prevented him from realising the potential rewards that should have been made from his many inventions. He also managed to get on the wrong side of the

banker JP Morgan which resulted in his ambitions and imagination being thwarted due to an inability to raise funding.

Above all else he was motivated to invent so that humanity as a whole could benefit, this altruism denied him a fortune and perversely prevented his reputation from spreading.

In the next inspirations the subject will be David Bowie who played the role of Nikola Tesla in the film "[The Prestige](#)" - I have not seen it yet but plan to do so soon.

Next Months Issue

If you have enjoyed this newsletter please feel free to pass it on to a friend or colleague using the Forward email option at the foot of this email. Recent new subscribers include readers in Saudi Arabia and Kenya so the word is spreading nicely.

In the next newsletter we will be focusing upon monitoring and controlling your project.

[Dominic Moss](#)

Principal Consultant- Projectability

Projectability have been helping people and organisations achieve more through effective Project Management and the use of the Microsoft Project scheduling tool since 1996. Our full range of offerings can be viewed on our [Website](#).

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Projectability | 3 Waterside | Station Road | Harpenden | Hertfordshire | AL5 4US | United Kingdom