



ViewPoints

Projectability's monthly newsletter

July 2009 - Vol 1, Issue 7

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Project Reading



[Making it Happen](#)

In a change from normal the project reading book this month mirrors this month's inspiring character, [Sir John Harvey Jones](#).

Making it happen whilst ostensibly a business book makes for a great read due primarily to the obvious love of the subject conveyed by the writer. His interest in what makes businesses and people tick shines through in this best selling book.

Subtitled reflections on leadership it provides an inspiring insight into how to lead people by harnessing their talent, intelligence and enthusiasm.

Dear Reader,

Hello once again,

Wow, July 1st - 2009 is now half way through. Special greetings to those of you who have taken the time to provide me with feedback both positive and negative. In the spirit of good project management I am learning and applying the lessons learned to each new issue.

This month I continue exploring key elements of successful project management focusing upon Project Communications an often overlooked but crucial element in project success.

Happy Planning - Dominic



Project Communications

In any survey into the causes of project failure **poor and ineffective communication** regularly stands out as a major cause of failure. People on my courses nod ruefully whenever I ask them if they have ever been let down by poor communications, bearing out the survey results that I quote.

There can be any number of reasons as to why this happens but frequently it will be due to there being no thought given to communications planning itself and no clearly defined channels of communication.

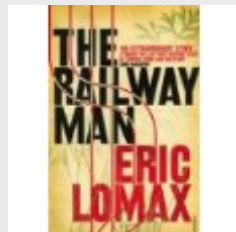
When leading and directing a project you are likely to be engaging with people at various levels within your organisation. They will have different backgrounds, different areas of expertise and probably differing cultural backgrounds to yourself. How on earth do you satisfy such a diverse audience? The answer lies in ensuring that you provide the right information to the right people at the right time and in a format that is suited to their information needs. This will require some time and effort on your part to prepare and plan.

Start by identifying your communications stakeholders, can you clearly define each of your stakeholders communication needs? If in doubt check with them, they may be pleasantly surprised at being consulted which may in turn make them more amenable to your project than they might previously have been.

Try to understand what you are trying to achieve by

Whilst not categorised as a project book the examples provided will prove valuable to any project manager looking for ideas on how to lead their teams successfully.

Reading for Pleasure - The Railway Man



[The Railway Man](#)

Whilst the subject matter of this book may not exactly be enjoyable the insight into the human condition and the power of forgiveness despite unimaginable suffering serve as a powerful and uplifting tonic to every day life.

The story is told in a simple and matter of fact manner that only serves to make the description of the treatment endured by the author even more chilling and horrifying.

Ultimately the book is a story of endurance and redemption, read it and be inspired.

Are you Linked In?



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

Project Conference



The [Microsoft Project Conference](#) takes place in Phoenix Arizona on 14th - 17th September.

communicating with your stakeholders. You want to keep them informed as to the status of the project but in a way that is relevant to them and their role in your project. They will not thank you if you significantly add to their information overload so try to ensure that your communications are both timely and relevant.

Identify the relevant communications points in your schedule, some information may be required by senior management on a monthly basis whereas the project team might well benefit from more frequent and easily digested communication. For senior management focused on managing by exception some form of highlight reports will be useful.

A Communication Plan describes how you propose to communicate the right messages to the right people at the right time. Within a Communication Plan, the communication objectives, stakeholders and their expectations, communication actions and timetable can be described. A Communication Plan helps you keep everyone informed so that you can communicate consistently with your target audiences.

When should you use a Communication Plan?

Whenever you have a mix of team members, external suppliers, customers and stakeholders to communicate with, then you should identify your planned communications formally in a Communication Plan.

A clear Communications Plan is a key ingredient in the success of any project of significance. It is also critical to the success of projects, as it ensures that all stakeholders are kept properly informed of the progress of a project.

The best time to perform Communication Planning is during the start up phase of a project. This should guarantee that your Communication Plan includes the tasks needed to communicate effectively throughout the entire project life cycle.

In the next newsletter I intend focusing in detail on the type of information you should consider including in a Project Highlight Report.

MPUG



In the last edition I plugged the launch meeting for the Midlands Chapter of MPUG, for the majority of you this event would have been irrelevant as it was not local to you.

MPUG membership is well 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

Words of Wisdom

"The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work."
ARTHUR BRISBANE

chapter events also provide you with the opportunity to learn more at first hand and to exchange experiences with fellow users.

Downloads



There are numerous documents available to download **free of charge** on our Website - please feel free to take a look!

CTRL+ - Handy Microsoft Project Keyboard Shortcuts



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.

If you are looking to edit multiple tasks or resources to have the same value the **CTRL+D** "fill down" keyboard shortcut is a real time saver. Start by editing the first cell with the value you wish to invest multiple tasks or resources with and press return. Select the edited cell and then using the SHIFT and down arrow buttons together select the range of cells to be invested with the same value and then press **CTRL+D** - this will fill down the value in the first cell to all other selected cells.

This approach is particularly useful when editing resource information as there can be many times where a large number of resources will have common values such as charge rates, employee type, location etc.

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 fits nicely with the theme of communication covered in the lead article in this edition. "Filtering and reporting on critical tasks is fine, displaying them using the Gantt Chart Wizard is great, however for reporting purposes I like to display the baseline display in the Gantt chart view, how can I also show critical tasks easily in my schedule?"

There are two ways to convey the critical tasks in your schedule whilst displaying the baseline - you can either modify the "Bar Styles" or employ "Text Styles", in this answer we focus on the latter.

The tabular part of the Gantt Chart view can be formatted just as easily as the time-phased display. In the Format menu select "Text Styles" and in the "item to change" list select "Critical Tasks" with this item selected you can change the font, font style, font size, colour, background colour and background pattern (the last 2 options assume you are using Project 2007). I tend to favour displaying Critical Tasks in Red Italic font and don't bother with cell shading - I also tend to favour displaying Milestones in Blue Bold font - you can change both the critical and milestone text styles at the same time. Click the OK button for your changes to take effect.

In next months Ask the Expert we will explain how to display the critical path in the timephased element of the Gantt Chart View.

A document [illustrating this approach](#) is available in the [downloads section](#) of our website.

Inspirations - Sir John Harvey Jones



If you have received an email from me you may well have noticed a quotation from [Sir John Harvey Jones](#) in my signature, if you haven't here it is.

"The nicest thing about NOT planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise and is not preceded by a period of worry and depression."

Sir John was a hugely successful leader of what was a beacon of British industry, ICI. He also presented a BAFTA winning TV series in the early 1990's called Troubleshooter in which in each episode he tried to sort out the issues confronting a struggling enterprise. His suggestions were sometimes brutal but always well founded. The series made for entertaining television and made business issues interesting to a wider public. The series had far more value and substance than a show currently fronted by another Sir!. He was voted "Most Impressive Industrialist" for 3 years running by his peers.

Sir Johns larger than life personality and genuine interest in all those he met made him an inspiring and engaging character. I was lucky enough to be attending Cranfield School of Management when one of the Troubleshooter series was being broadcast and as a result it provided great material for discussion and analysis in our group.

In addition to his achievements as a captain of industry and a broadcaster Sir John was also famous for his flamboyant taste in ties, his charitable involvement and his love of Donkeys.

Sir John has left a lasting legacy that is an example to us all.

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. We already have subscribers in Canada, the USA and both Brazil and Argentina in South America.

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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