

Why Have a Separate Project Management Methodology?

When asked if they have a project management methodology most organizations answer with, “Of course we do”. In many cases when checking into this methodology we discover the methodology they are referring to is some type of systems development life cycle (SDLC) with a bit of project management thrown in.

The project management methodology integrated into the SDLC might be pretty good but what happens if your project doesn’t require the SDLC? What do you do then? Or what if, as we commonly find, the project management elements of your SDLC are simply inadequate?

Project Management Methodology

The project management methodology should address the specific project management deliverables. This includes specific processes for project initiation, prioritization, project planning, status reporting, issue/decision/change management, quality management, risk management, etc. These fundamental elements of project management apply to virtually all projects.

The same basic project management methodology should work whether you’re implementing a new customer application or if you’re managing an office move. What will be different is the “product methodology” – the methodology you need to use to deliver the product or outcome of your project.

Product Methodology

The product methodology should address the specific steps, processes and deliverables associated with the type of projects being implemented. For example, a traditional systems project might utilize a “waterfall-type” approach; a prototyping project might utilize a rapid applications development (RAD) approach; a web-based application might use the Agile methodology; and a building or construction project would follow an engineering methodology.

In essence the product methodology becomes a plug-in component to the project. The project manager can choose the methodology that makes the most sense based on the project. This degree of flexibility is critical to handle the full spectrum of project types.

Build or Buy

The word “methodology” can sometimes leave people with the uncomfortable feeling of increased bureaucracy. While some methodologies go over the top in terms of details the key to success with your project management methodology should be to drive home the basics. It should clearly define the fundamental elements of project management and how to deliver them. It should focus on achieving consistency in critical deliverables (i.e. status reports, issue tracking, risk tracking, close-out processes, etc.). Consistency is the key to rolling up projects and therefore providing program managers, portfolio managers and executives with clear and concise information regarding projects.

Some organizations buy their project management methodology others build their own. The key to success is to make sure you have something that can be easily used by all project managers in all areas of the organization. A complicated methodology that is customized to one discipline (i.e. engineering or IT) will not resonate with business areas who are managing their own projects. On the other hand an overly simple methodology will not support your

more advanced areas. You need to acquire or build a methodology that can be easily scaled to the meet the broad needs of the organization.

Summary

The best practice is to have a separate project management methodology. This approach will ensure your organization has a simple standard approach to managing projects ensuring all projects can be easily rolled up into programs and portfolios. Organizations that use a combined project management / SDLC methodology tend to not use their project management on non-IT projects or even on IT projects that don't fit the traditional SDLC. If you hope to move your project management practices from just within IT and/or Engineering and into the rest of the business this separation of methodologies is critical.

So go back and ask yourself that first question again – do you have a stand-alone project management methodology? If not, then start working towards decoupling it from your integrated methodologies.

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