



Well Begun – Well Done

Every now and then project management practitioners should reflect on what they do and what is their contribution to the undertaking. What role do they play in each phase of the life cycle and what is its relative importance? There is a strong body of opinion that a project manager's greatest contribution to the project effort is at the front end of the project.

Selection

Has the right project been selected? Is this project delivering benefits to the organization or has it been initiated merely to improve a senior executive's (sponsor) profile? It is all very well having a terrific project manager and project management methodology but it is very important not to confuse activity for effectiveness.

Project Purpose

Does the client really know what they want and why they are doing it? When the project, as requested is complete, will they then turn-around and say "this is good but it is not really what we want." Against this backdrop, trying to get sign-off from the client can prove to be both demanding and difficult.

Executive Support

Assuming that **Selection** and **Project Purpose** are firmly grounded in reality the next question is "are the key players aware of what is going on and even more important are they on board with their support?" A recent UK survey from Arras People identified a lack of executive support as the biggest reason for project failure.

Planning

The risk profile is higher at the project's front end as the quality of information available is weak. It is well worth while engaging expertise during the planning phase to help to trash out resolutions to problems. Remember the old adage - "a stitch in time saves nine" spending a little at this point can save handsomely downstream. If after entering into contracts with providers you then discover that you have adopted the wrong approach to delivering the result it is very difficult to disengage.

Scope

Getting a firm grip on the project's scope is of paramount importance. There is a natural instinct to rush in and immediately get "cracking" on the project. Step back and knuckle down to the hard grind of detailing the requirements. There is often a resistance to this as it is both demanding and takes a lot of mental energy. It is akin to doing a tough work-out in the gym when you don't really feel like it.

Scope creep and design changes are primary drivers for threats to cost overruns, schedule delays or quality reductions.

Project origination and project initiation demands great attention and awareness from the project manager. If you have doubts about the project's rationale, approach or expectations, be prepared to ask the difficult question at this stage – it may well save a lot of pain and grief downstream.