

Has The Economy Changed How We Do Projects Forever?

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In the continuing drumbeat of bad economic news over the past month, there is a fundamental underlying shift on how this economy has impacted project selection and execution. This is also an excellent opportunity for the creative, risk-taking PM to gain a career advantage and strengthen the role of the PMO in today's companies.

TREND NUMBER ONE:

Companies want to do more with less

We have all seen this trend and unfortunately some of us may be one of the casualties of this trend. I advocate that project management is more important than ever to fully understand how we do the basic package of work in business: the project. I want to be clear in this area, the PM must be a hands-on PM, and not an administrator. The company needs to have a cost and efficiency watchdog in the project and the PM should take on this role. In the majority of most companies, the first question a new PM should ask is "how many projects do we have ongoing." I guarantee the answer is usually no idea. I always find it amazing that a company will spend the treasure of the company and have no idea what they are spending it on, but always think PMs are too costly! The PMO should also be at the vanguard in advocating the proper allocation of resources and ensure that a constant return is being delivered in each project.

TREND NUMBER TWO:

Trust has gone out the window

In today's project, the team constantly hears of layoffs and constantly lives with the thought am I next, no matter how talented you are in your job. This trend may be very pronounced in your company or it is lurking under the surface and senior management does not want acknowledge the issue. This trend is probably the most troubling today and will have long-lasting impact. The members of your team may believe that creativity and thinking outside of the box is too risky and will expose you to being on the layoff list. The team may also believe that they should not help other members of the team and worse they believe that making the other person look bad is the best offense and takes the harsh light off them and their tasks. The PM must address this head on with the appropriate managers and get a solid buy in that these petty issues will not be tolerated in the project. The PM along with the managers needs to then deliver that message to the team and all be held accountable if issues arise. Here, the key to remember is that TRUST=PRODUCTIVITY.

TREND NUMBER THREE:**Give the customer their money's worth**

In many projects over the years, we all had the proverbial "day 2" list. In the new economy, the customer not only requests, but also demands their money's worth. I am not advocating you throw to the side the idea of scope creep, but why would you now need to set a clear standard that a small change you classified as day 2 before, needs to be completed to ensure the future revenue stream with the client. The PM must ensure the deliverables are fully documented and the communication is solid from all ends of the project so expectations are clearly set on what is being produced and when...

TREND NUMBER FOUR:**Will companies ever undertake a large project again?**

We have all been involved in the large mega project and wondered quietly how can this ever be done on time, and within budget? I am a practicing PM and even sometimes question the project fundamentals of these projects, so a senior manager who is not a project person has even more doubts. I believe mega projects will not go away, but funding will be more difficult and PMs will be held to a much higher level of responsibility and be measured on the triple constraint. I also believe that as PMs we need to advocate for strict approaches where we do wave planning and break projects into smaller components. I fully recognize the need for an agile approach, but please do not be enamored by phrases. The bottom line is you have to do the work the most efficient way possible.

I realize there are other trends, but this article is meant to stress that in a down economy, strong project management is even more crucial to the execution of the company's business strategy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jim Hannon has over fifteen years of diversified experience in the Information Technology and Financial Services Industries, functioning primarily as a Unit Manager/Senior Project Manager/Lead Business Analyst/Technical Team Lead with proven experience in trading systems and numerous financial applications. He has a PMP, PM-RMP, and Prince 2 certified Fundamentals and will be sitting for the Pm-SP exam in Sept 2011.

He has a record of success working on large financial trading Internet development projects and has managed the implementation of STP solutions. Jim has worked with a range of products from Annuities to esoteric Mortgage Derivatives. He has also been involved in an enterprise-wide project to implement a corporate-wide enhanced security solution for the flagship product.

Jim's vast experience with Software Development LifeCycle (SDLC) and Software implementation enables him to lead projects in a cross-functional, matrixed environment and manage project scope, project schedule, quality, budget, communications, and change management. He also has extensive experience as a Senior Analyst, from gathering requirements to completing User Acceptance testing.

In addition, Jim's other management skills include top down and bottom up estimating, Prince 2, Agile, Scrum, risk assessment, resource planning, Microsoft Project, SEI CMM, RAD, JAD, Prototyping, PMBOK, meeting facilitation, project repository, and post project survey.

Jim is a certified online adult education instructor and on-ground instructor at Boston University, University of Phoenix, Excelsior College, and Cambridge College. He teaches all levels of Accounting, Business Ethics, Business Law, Micro and Macro Economics, Project Management, and Financial Management. He is also a PhD candidate at Capella University in Project Management.