

## Practical Project Management – Tips and Traps

### Part Five – Making Project Management Work – Tips & Traps

**Note:** This summer, I celebrated my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of project management involvement with the release of my 2<sup>nd</sup> book: *“Practical Project Management: Tips, Tactics, and Tools”* by *Harvey A. Levine, John Wiley & Sons, 2002*. Scattered throughout this text are some hundred or so Tips and Traps that are based on my experiences during these four decades of project management practice.

This is the fifth of a series of articles built around these tips and traps statements. It captures the essence of almost 400 pages of practical project management advice, in just a few short articles. Of course, you are invited to delve deeper into the material at a later time. Also, you will find selected excerpts of the book’s chapters on this website as separate papers.

## Training

### TIP – Training-Tailored to the user

Training should be designed to meet the specific needs of the trainee. This will require multi-faceted, multi-level training sessions, aimed at a target audience. The project management system should be designed to recognize the role of each user, especially in regard to input forms, output forms and included data. The training sessions should pick up on these specifics and show how the system is designed for each user in the audience, and how it will be used by each. (Ch. 13-1)

### TRAP – No training = Failure

Here is something that I can state with absolute certainty. It is entirely impossible to implement a computer-based project management capability without also implementing a broad, multi-level training program. Even if the computer plays a small role in your project management process, an understanding of the principles of project management and the local practices that have been put in place cannot be taken for granted. A formal training effort is required to prevent failure of the project management initiative. (Ch. 13-1)

## Making Project Communication Work:

### TIP – Poor communication = Failure

When properly handled, good, effective, timely, appropriate communication can have an important role in achieving project success. On the other hand, poor, haphazard, incomplete, untimely and misdirected communication is a recipe for project failure. (Ch. 13-2)

### TRAP – Communication-Tailored to the target audience

There is a tendency to employ a “one-size-fits-all” philosophy when designing input screens and reporting formats. This will encourage resistance to support of the system by the target users, and cannot be justified in light of the capabilities of today’s PM tools. (Ch. 13-2)

## Why Project Management Implementation Programs Fail

### **TRAP – There's no such thing as a free lunch**

The failures in implementing PM can be traced back to this simple misconception: that we can take shortcuts with PM -- that we can treat it casually and unprofessionally -- and still have it work. (Ch. 13-3)

### **TRAP – Organizations must allow for flexibility**

Rigid organizational structures can prevent the firm from a prompt and appropriate response to a crisis or critical deadline. All organizations must be able to establish temporary teams or task forces to respond to such situations. (Ch. 13-4)

## Stimulating Initiative and Innovation: The Psychological Contract

### **TRAP – Three things that stifle initiative and innovation**

Initiative and innovation are often stifled by organizational segmentation, the absence of trust, and the unwillingness to take risks. When any of these three conditions exist, it is difficult for talented individuals to flourish and to contribute all that they are capable of. This is a lose-lose situation, as the individuals feel frustrated and unappreciated and the firm fails to obtain the full measure of each individual's potential contribution. (Ch. 13-5)

### **TIP – Try this! The Psychological Contract**

Leaders, whether formal managers or temporary leaders or even those to which we voluntarily grant authority, who offer to negotiate a Psychological Contract, stand the best chance of providing a stimulating environment for all involved. (Ch. 13-5)

### **TIP – Access to the best people**

In the 21st century, maintaining a cadre of knowledgeable, skilled, motivated, workers will be a major component of the true assets of a company. Being able to pull workers from this store, based on matching skills and assignment preferences to the need, will be of paramount importance to success. (Ch. 13-5)

## Shared Rewards

### **TRAP – Shared responsibility = shared rewards**

In the traditional system, we give individuals responsibility and a list of expectations. We then measure performance and distribute rewards. We expect the rewards to motivate performance. When there is shared responsibility and expectations, such as may exist in the projects environment, we often maintain the individual measurement and rewards system. This promotes individual performance over team performance. (Ch. 13-6)

## **TRAP – Shared rewards can still recognize the individual**

The reward system, even when designed to recognize the accomplishment of teams, must never forget that each member of the team is an individual. Each person requires recognition as an individual as well as a team member, and each person will have reward needs based on that person's specific needs and expectations. While the shared rewards should recognize shared results, they need not be cookie-cutter rewards, but rather provide for equal rewards based on individual preferences. (Ch. 13-6)

*Editor's note: The Tips & Traps presented in this five-part series come from Mr. Levine's book: "Practical Project Management, Tips, Tricks, and Tools". For your information, here is the Table of Contents for that book.*

1. *Setting up the PM Operation*
  - 1.1. *About Projects & Project Management*
  - 1.2. *Organizing for Project Management*
  - 1.3. *The Central Project Office*
  - 1.4. *Implementing a Computer-based PM Capability*
2. *Getting Started*
  - 2.1. *Project Initiation Techniques*
  - 2.2. *Do you Weebis? Clarifying WBS, OBS & RBS*
  - 2.3. *Project Life Cycles*
3. *Scheduling*
  - 3.1. *Critical Path Scheduling*
  - 3.2. *Critical Path, Critical Chain & Uncertainty: Concepts of Shared Contingency*
  - 3.3. *Estimating Task Durations*
  - 3.4. *How Important are Schedules & Time Compression?*
  - 3.5. *Practical Scheduling*
4. *Resource and Workforce Management*
  - 4.1. *An Overview of the Different Elements of Resource Management*
  - 4.2. *Role-based Needs for Managing Resources in a Project-Driven Org.*
  - 4.3. *Resource Leveling & Games of Chance*
  - 4.4. *Practical Resource Scheduling*
5. *Budgeting & Cost Control*
  - 5.1. *Concepts & Issues of Project Budgeting & Cost Control*
  - 5.2. *Software Support for Cost Management*
6. *Risk & Contingency Management*
  - 6.1. *Using & Managing Contingency*
  - 6.2. *Risk Management for the Sigmaphobic: Managing Schedule, Cost, and Technical Risk and Contingency*
  - 6.3. *Some Computer-based Approaches to Schedule Risk Analysis*
7. *Maintaining the Plan*

- 7.1. *Change Control & Scope Management*
- 7.2. *Real-time Status vs. Period Data*
- 7.3. *Automatic PM: A Classic Oxymoron*
- 8. *Performance Management*
  - 8.1. *Measuring the Value of Work Accomplishment*
- 9. *Project Portfolio Management*
  - 9.1. *Defining Project Portfolio Management*
  - 9.2. *Bridging the Gap Between Operations Management and Projects Management*
  - 9.3. *Project Selection & Risk*
- 10. *Project Management, Enterprise Resource Management (ERP) and Enterprise Resource Planning*
  - 10.1. *The Search for Automated, Integrated, Enterprise-wide Project Management*
  - 10.2. *Integrating PM & ERP*
- 11. *Project Management & Professional Services Automation (PSA)*
  - 11.1. *Defining the PSA Market*
  - 11.2. *Building PSA Solutions*
- 12. *Tools of the Trade*
  - 12.1. *A Simplified & Balanced Approach to PM Software Selection*
  - 12.2. *New Names for Old Games: Rebadging Sound & Proven PM Concepts*
  - 12.3. *The "e" Revolution (Collaboration Services, B2B, Gateways)*
- 13. *Making Project Management Work*
  - 13.1. *Implementing Project Management: Commitment & Training Ensure Success*
  - 13.2. *Making Project Communication Work*
  - 13.3. *Why PM Implementation Programs Fail*
  - 13.4. *Teams, Task Forces & Bureaucrats*
  - 13.5. *The Psychological Contract: How to Stimulate Initiative & Innovation in any Organization*
  - 13.6. *Shared Rewards*

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Mr. Levine is the leading consultant to the project management software industry and is recognized as the leading expert in tools for project management. He has been Adjunct Professor of Project Management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Boston University. He has conducted project management public seminars for ASCE, AMA, IBM, and PMI.

Mr. Levine is the author of the book "Project Management using Microcomputers" and has published extensively in other books, periodicals, and videos. Mr. Levine is past president of the Project Management Institute and the recipient of PMI's 1989 Distinguished Contribution to Project Management award. He was recently elected a Fellow of PMI.

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