

Performance Based PROJECT MANAGEMENT
increasing the probability of project success
By Glen B. Alleman
(A book review by R. Max Wideman, FPMP)

The views expressed in this article are strictly those of Max Wideman.
 The contents of the book under review are the copyright property of the author.
 Published here July 2015

Introduction

"Projects fail to meet goals for many reasons: poor time and budget performance, inability to deal with complexity, uncontrolled changes in scope. Even the most experienced project managers can be caught off guard. *Performance Based Project Management* helps you avoid nasty surprises and enhance the probability of success. Rather than simply implementing technical and operational requirements – the traditional approach – you'll learn to focus on providing specific capabilities that produce measurable business value."

So says the back page of the book's flysheet. That's a pretty tall order and potential readers should be wary of what is intended by the term "success", in what environment, and who are you that might be seeking that success? So the promotional material goes on to observe:

"Performance Based Project Management adapts the project management methods originating in the aerospace industry to accommodate any project, in any industry, and of any size."

While that may be true of any project, we think the traditional industries like engineering and building construction are likely to be less interested. However, the "step-by-step framework in the form of immutable principles, practices, and processes" as presented by author Glen Alleman are much more likely to interest project proponents in the many hi-tech and software industries. Indeed, this impression seems not unreasonable given the author's background described below, the reading list on his web site, and the author's assertion that:¹

"The singular beneficial takeaway of this book is:

- How to clearly define the purpose of the project; that is how to have clarity of purpose,
- How to construct the artifacts, or elements, that represent that clarity, and
- How to measure the performance of the technical outcomes from the work on the project performed by the people."

That is the language of projects in the hi-tech industries.

Nevertheless, the author makes a great play of the word "done" that we think is more insightful and more universal, and would even make a better title for the book. As the author says:²

"In this book the word 'done' has a special meaning. It means that the customer is satisfied with the outcomes of the project."

We heartily concur. But then he adds:³

"The customer must have specified these outcomes up front in the form of a set of capabilities the project will provide, with some unit of measure meaningful to the decision makers – the customer. This is a very specific definition and will be used throughout the book to mean 'compliance with all the measures, technical and operational

specifications, planned cost, and schedule'."

That's all well and good but not every proponent of a project is that technically sophisticated and in many cases simply waits to see what "done" looks like to decide: "Well, that's not really what I had in mind!"

In the chapters that follow, the author describes in great detail how "done" can and should be achieved by applying the set of project management "principles, practices and processes that are all needed for success". The details thus presented provide an excellent macro project management process for any project work in the medium to hi-tech industries. We will discuss this further in a later section of this review.

The book concludes with a chapter on fourteen documents that the author thinks are essential to be established during the execution of a project, if that project is to be successful.

About the author

Glen B. Alleman has more than thirty years of experience as a program manager and performance management consultant in the aerospace, defense, and enterprise information technology fields. He is also author of a popular project management blog called "Herding Cats". He lives in Niwot, Colorado and his web site is <http://herdingcats.typepad.com>. He may be reached at glen.alleman@niwotridge.com

Book Structure

The content of this book is set out in seven chapters and two Appendices as follows:

1. The Ten Drivers of Project Success
2. The Five Immutable Principles of Project Success
3. The Five Immutable Practices of Project Success
4. The Five Governing Processes of Project Management
5. Project Management Execution
6. Tailoring the Principles and Practices for Project Success
7. Deliverables Needed for Project Management Success

Recommended Reading

Notes

Each chapter concludes with a brief summary "Looking Back" and an alert about "What's Ahead". The book contains 29 explanatory figures, and has a total of 238 pages. It does not include a Glossary of Terms, nor does it include a list of acronyms for ease of reference.

As the chapter titles imply, the project management framework of the book is built around the project's Drivers listed in Chapter 1. These are supported by the Principles and their respective Practices that call for the Processes that ultimately result in fourteen key documents during project execution. Although none are explicitly listed in the Table of Contents, we list them all here for ease of reference and to facilitate an understanding of the book's contents.

The ten drivers of the Principles that enable the Practices are:⁴

1. Capabilities drive system requirements
2. Requirements are defined in work packages
3. Work packages produce the deliverables

4. The Performance Measurement Baseline (PMB) describes the work sequence
5. Measures of physical percent complete defined 'Done' for each work package
6. Work authorization assures proper delivery of value
7. Produced and measurable value defines progress
8. All measures are adjusted for technical performance compliance
9. Fulfilled requirements produce delivered capabilities
10. Past performance is a forecast of future performance

The Five Principles presented in the form of questions are:⁵

1. Where are we going?
2. How are we going to get there?
3. Do we have everything we need?
4. What impediments will we encounter, and how will we remove them?
5. How are we going to measure our progress?

The Five Practices, derived from the foregoing Principles and presented in the form of activities are:⁶

1. Identify needed capabilities
2. Define a requirements baseline
3. Develop a Performance Measurement Baseline
4. Execute the Performance Measurement Baseline
5. Apply continuous Risk Management

Having laid out this pattern, the Drivers are then looked at in more detail and we find that each can be further subdivided into bulleted or numbered lists as appropriate.⁷ Finally: "With our principles, practices in place, we can now go to work".⁸

What we liked

How to Measure Progress to Plan

Author Glen Alleman starts out this section with the observation: "Measuring progress is difficult on many projects."⁹ He observes that some simply measure money spent relative to budget, while others measure the passage of time relative to scheduled completion. But these, either separately or together, "are far from sufficient in support of the 'Five Immutable Principles'. None of these measurements speak to what was actually done on the project in terms of our movement towards 'done'."¹⁰

Glen goes on to say: "The key principle here is 'planned progress'. . . . Preplanning progress is the basis of 'performance-based' measurement for both project processes and technical products." We heartily agree. Note the distinction between "project processes", that is to say the processes involving the tools and techniques of project management, and "technical products", which refers to the work involved in the "maturing" (or evolving) final deliverable, product or outcome.

With these words, Glen effectively disentangles Project Process Management (project management) from Product Development Management (technology management).¹¹ While it might seem obvious, this is an important distinction. Many arguments surrounding project management issues arise due to the failure to recognize this difference.

So what is the definition of "done", or the definition of "success" in a project context? Our author suggests:¹²

"Let's ask the questions for the Five Immutable Principles again in a slightly expanded form and examine what credible answers might be:

- Do we know what 'done' looks like in units of measure meaningful to the decision makers?

Done needs to be measured as the capabilities provided to the buyer. These capabilities provide the business or organization with the 'ability' to do something new, something in support of its strategy."

A framework for the Five Immutable Practices

Glen states that:¹³

"Each of the Five Practices, guided by the Five Immutable Principles, performs a specific function in our efforts to increase the Probability of Project Success (PoPS). Like the principles, the practices are not a cafeteria-style approach, from which you can pick and choose what to apply to the project. Each practice contains specific steps needed to produce measurable outcomes to increase the PoPS."

And adds:

"This actionable information is the feedback information needed to keep a project under control and on track. These control processes are not impediments to progress; ***they are the tools needed to increase the probability of success.***" (Emphasis added.)

"The customer doesn't actually buy features and functions. The customer buys a capability to do something of value."

"Without knowing what capabilities we need at the end of the project, the requirements, and everything else around managing the project has no home, no reason for being, and no connection to the goal of the project."

"Instead of starting with requirements, we need to start with capabilities that describe 'done' in Measures of Effectiveness for the outcomes of the project, ***not just delivery of solutions derived from the requirements.***"¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Glen then describes how this should be approached, how to identify the Requirements Baseline, how to establish and execute the Performance Measurement Baseline, and how to perform Continuous Risk Management. These provide the backdrop for deploying the better-known processes necessary for actually executing the work of the project. Glen lists these in another "set-of-five" as follows:

1. Organize the project
2. Plan, schedule, and budget
3. Execute project accounting
4. Execute project performance analysis
5. Record revisions and maintain data

We would much prefer the traditional version of "Plan, Organize, Execute, Monitor, and Control"¹⁵ but perhaps Glen's version is more specific in today's environment.¹⁶

Tailoring the Principles and Practices for Project Success

We were very pleased to see that this complex arrangement of "Performance-Based Project Management" can, and should, be tailored to various kinds of project. Interestingly, the author does not

classify projects according to the anticipated cost, the expected duration, the number of stakeholders, and so on, as is most typical. Rather, the tailoring of the Performance-Based Project Management practices and processes has three levels:¹⁷

1. **Level 1: Minimal implementation of the practices.** The project is small, the desired outcomes are known, the users are identified, and they agree on the outcomes. The technology or processes are known to work. The 'value at risk' is low. There is high confidence in the budget and schedule.
2. **Level 2: Moderate implementation of the practices.** The project is developing something new within a known technical or operational domain. Teams of people who have the right skills and experience but may not have worked with each other before create issues that go beyond just the technical risks.
3. **Level 3: Major implementation of the practices.** When the project is complex and risky, we must apply all of the elements of each practice to the project.

In short, before executing any project, you should figure out its "Level" (of required management) and apply that level accordingly.

Three examples of Project Management Execution

We really enjoyed reading Chapter 5, which is dedicated to demonstrating how to apply these principles, practices, and processes across three simplified, hypothetical, but real-world projects, namely:

1. **A Personal Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)** using commercial off-the-shelf parts, the Internet community, and some mechanical, electrical and software skills, capable of following a person on a bike and taking video, all for under \$1000.
2. **A kitchen remodeling** using a kitchen designer and general contractor to achieve top-shelf built-in appliances, gas range and oven, granite counter tops, hardwood floors, wine bar, coffee bar for around \$60,000, all to the satisfaction to the "stakeholder".¹⁸
3. **A Health Insurance Provider ERP System** consisting of an "off-the-shelf" claims processing system with a moderate amount of customization designed to integrate legacy systems, migration of all legacy records, training, rollout, and go live for about \$100 million. This is a serious project, one that "bets the company" on its success.

In each case, as you might have guessed, is the key question: What constitutes "done"?

Downside

The lists of principles, practices and processes that author Glen Alleman presents make good sense and provide good check lists for the action items needed to get any significant project under way. However, we are not clear whether they all flow linearly, or to what extent some activities that come under different headings can be undertaken concurrently.

As an aside, one cannot help feeling that the author has a love affair with the number "five" in deriving his several sets of listings, even to the extent that some items are compounded to meet the limit of five. But perhaps that is just good salesmanship!

We did have difficulty in understanding the first two chapters, to the extent that we abandoned trying to make logical sense and flow of the content. For example, in the Introduction, Glen Alleman asserts: "The customer must have specified these outcomes [that prescribe the word "done" as defined] up front in the form of a set of capabilities the project will provide, with some unit of measure meaningful to the decision makers – the customer."¹⁹

This assumes that the customer is sufficiently sophisticated to know exactly what they need or want and has knowledge in the potential technology of the project. In our experience sufficiency is rarely the case and requires the contributions of subject matter experts (SMEs). Indeed, the author later observes: "The classic example is the enterprise IT project, where the users don't actually know what they want the system to do."²⁰

Speaking of SMEs, we found little mention amongst the lists of principles, practices and processes of the need to find the *right people* for the project team. Firstly, the project requires the right people for input when developing requirements and baselines, and secondly people with the right production expertise required to carry out the work. Then there is the question of how best to get the production (or execution) phase started. How about an opening brain storming or information session?

Of course, the book is all about defining the word "done" in respect of specific projects. However, the book is also about PoPS (Probability of Project Success),²¹ but nowhere could we find a definition or indication of what the author had in mind for this term. The reason we raise this is because the project management community is seriously divided over this issue.

Traditionally, *project* success has been seen as the completion of the work "On Time, On Budget and As Defined [or specified]". To this may be added "stakeholder satisfaction". But none of these include the concept of a resulting successful *product*, as many would like to assert. No doubt this is largely because the determination of product success requires successful product deployment – a responsibility that is typically beyond the purview of the project manager. It is true that the author does provide us with "The five Immutable Principles of project success" but these all address the issues of how to get there rather than explaining what that success actually is.

As an aside, we had difficulty making sense out of some of the figures, or seeing their relevance, especially where key information is presented in white characters in a box of black background. White characters on a black background are much more difficult to read. Thus the message behind many of the figures could be improved — in our opinion.

Summary

This book is important because it reveals what is needed to implement an advanced form of project management and how that should be accomplished. It emphasizes the significance of "done", i.e., what does "done" mean, what does it look like, how do we get there, and how do we know when we have got there. Many people know this proposition as the "characteristics of completion".

Some parts of the book tend to be difficult to follow and, we feel, could be edited for technical consistency and simplicity. The novice reader could easily get lost in the intricacies of the book's framework. Nevertheless the book does provide sound advice at an in-depth level. That is, at a level that the experienced reader can use to implement the author's recommendations on an actual project.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

¹ Alleman, Glen B., *Performance Based Project Management*, AMACOM, USA, 2014, p3

² Ibid, p1

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid, pp17-18

⁵ Ibid, p16

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid, pp19-34

⁸ Ibid, p126

⁹ Ibid, p55

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid – see also Figure 6.3 on p177 and Figure 6.4 on p179

¹² Ibid, p59

¹³ Ibid, p69

¹⁴ Ibid, p70

¹⁵ Derived from the definition of management, first developed by Henri Fayol circa 1916 in his work *Administration Industrielle et Generale*

¹⁶ *Performance Based Project Management*, pp101-102, developed in detail in pages 102 to125.

¹⁷ Ibid, p165

¹⁸ Ibid, p137. "There is only one stakeholder — the 'monarch' of [the author's] kitchen." (p138)

¹⁹ Ibid, p1

²⁰ Ibid, p23

²¹ Ibid, p69