Time Management Essentials

The Project Management Institute's a Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) outlines time management as the processes required to manage timely completion of project components. These processes then interact with each other, and those of other PMBOK knowledge areas, to produce the final project deliverables.

Managing projects within time, cost, scope, and quality expectations is always challenging. Accomplishing this successfully requires disciplined leadership from a manager that can effectively manage not only their time but also that of their project team. The PMBOK identified six processes that encompass effective time management. These processes include:

- **Defining activities**: identifying specific actions to be performed to produce the project deliverables
- **Sequencing activities**: identifying and documenting relationships among project activities
- **Estimating activity resources**: estimating the type and quantities of resources required to perform each activity
- **Estimating activity durations**: approximating the number of work periods needed to complete individual activities with estimated resources
- **Developing the schedule**: analyzing activities sequences, durations, resource requirements, and schedule constraints to create the project schedule
- **Monitoring and controlling schedule**: monitoring and updating project status and progress

When applied properly these six processes provide a solid foundation for effective time management. However, when faced with the challenges of delivering upon expectations with limited resources and time, inexperienced managers often assume that taking on work themselves and extended work hours is the way to accomplish this. This is certainly not the case. As managers gain experience, they usually mature from doing work to actually managing work. They learn to delegate responsibilities to their team and begin employing

effective time management techniques to achieve results. However, one major hurdle that challenges almost all managers in effectively managing project time is what is often referred to as time robbers.

Time robbers are anything that steals valuable time away from focused objectives. Unfortunately, in project management there are a substantial number of time robbers that constantly compete for our productive time. Additionally, these same time robbers are often one of the greatest hurdles managers must overcome to successfully deliver results. Some of the more common and most significant time robbers that negatively impact project delivery include:

- Interruptions, socializing, or spending too much time answering questions
- Waiting on others for answers or approvals to move things forward
- Over burdensome bureaucracy, reviews, or micro-management
- Desire for perfection or over reactive or involved management
- Too many, unnecessary, or unproductive meetings
- Procrastination, poor planning, or bottlenecks

If not careful, a project manager can quickly and very easily get caught up in reacting to time robbers instead of managing the delivery of results. Such a scenario is extremely dangerous because not only do time robbers steal time and focus from management of effort but can also grow in their impact as they feed off the attention garnered from the inexperience project manager.

Fortunately, there are a number of techniques that project managers can apply, and approaches they can leverage, to better implement the practice of effective time management, ultimately eliminating many time robbers and reducing the impact of those that cannot be eliminated. Some of the more common and most effective strategies for better time management include:

- Defining and managing to a schedule
- Classifying activities and planning solid blocks of time to accomplish important things
- Establishing priorities and evaluating opportunity cost/lost on all activities
- Understanding what you are doing and eliminating that which you may not need to be doing at all
- Delegating activities that can be done just as well or better by someone else
- Managing by controlling stakeholder expectations
- Practicing selective neglect if absolutely necessary to accomplish more important objectives

Time is a limited resource that once lost cannot be replaced. The importance of properly managing what limited time is available to complete activities cannot be underemphasized. Ineffective time management has tremendously negative consequences, much farther reaching than just the immediate project or project team. Ineffective time management can not only negatively impacts project progress but also any dependant projects, tasks, and operational activities, team moral, communication, other schedules, and possibly most important, client and stakeholder perceptions of the manager and the success of the project.

Poor time management introduces unnecessary stress into the project atmosphere and overly complicates even the most elementary of activities. Recognizing that time management is an issue producing challenges that are impacting a project is often difficult to identify, let alone admit. However, it's important to keep in mind that every bottleneck avoided or time robber blocked frees up time that can be better allocated towards increasing the quality of project outcomes, shortening schedules, minimizing cost, more efficiently utilizing resources, and ultimately better servicing the needs of the project's client.

For more information on project time management, the CDC Unified Process or the Project Management Community of Practice please visit the CDC UP website at http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/. ▮

Project Management Community of Practice

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For more information on the Project Management Community of Practice visit the PMCoP website at http://www2.cdc.gov/cdcup/library/pmcop/ ▮

CDC Unified Process Presentations

The CDC UP offers a short overview presentation to any CDC FTE or Non-FTE group. Presentations are often performed at your facility, on a day of the week convenient for your group, and typically take place over lunch structured as one hour lunch-and-learn style meeting.

Contact the CDC Unified Process at cdcup@cdc.gov or visit http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup to arrange a short overview presentation for your group. ▮

Contact the CDC Unified Process

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