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Why Your Project Management Methodology
Doesn't Matter Much

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One of the greatest debates in project management is what is the best project management methodology? There are numerous articles and books touting particular methodologies. Each usually talks about the deficiencies of other methodologies and uses some version of the high failure rate of projects to meet cost, schedule and scope targets to prove their point. Some methodologies are overtly or covertly backed by vendors and consultants selling software and/or services related to the methodology. I have come across no credible proof of one methodology outperforming another methodology. I hope the following statement isn't a news flash...

It is not the methodology that is the primary factor of success. It is the leadership!

I have a client that was rolling out a new methodology. They had invested substantially in the methodology and training in project management. Early in the process the CIO called me aside and she asked "*Will this work?*" I responded by saying "*It will work if your leaders lead. A project management methodology and educated project managers ultimately escalate issues that require the organization to make decisions and lead.*" I am pleased to tell you three years later, all of this client's projects are in control and they have and are enjoying great success with project delivery. They have a good methodology, but more importantly they have strong leadership to back up their chosen methodology.

Strong leadership with regard to the methodology is much more than mandating compliance to the methodology.

Strong leadership is striking a balance between people dependency and process dependency with regard to the methodology. Too much methodology can contribute to project failure. We must have a balance. Project management is simply Structured, Organized, Common Sense. If uncertainty is high and the requirements are fluid, it is common sense to use an iterative method. If the deliverable is critical and it's execution and use involves life and death you may want a strict development methodology. There are always trade offs and there is no free lunch. One size does not fit all. PMO's and leaders have failed trying to make one size fit all.

Strong leadership is also choosing when to violate the methodology.

Sometimes there are circumstances that warrant not following the methodology. The key for success here is that exceptions and violations need to be formally approved by

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leadership. Without this formal approval individual project managers will violate the process and the process's integrity will erode over time to the point of being useless (useless... the methodology exists, it sits on a shelf, and we just don't follow it). The good part of pre-approving and approving violations to the methodology is that the violation requests themselves tell a story about the methodologies effectiveness and how it should be adjusted. Requests to violate the methodology are data that should be used to improve the methodology. These requests will lead you to the natural balance point for your organization's methodology.

A methodology doesn't have to be perfect!

Earlier I mentioned a client that showed strong leadership with regard to their methodology and project management. When the methodology was rolled out the leader told the project managers *"I am rolling this out and I know it is no more than 80% correct. However if we wait, it will still never be perfect. I want you to use it and tell me what's wrong with it. Tell me how it can be improved. You have my commitment that I will listen. I will fix what's wrong with it and I will improve it."* That's what he did. That's leadership! That is what made it successful. I have no doubt he could make any methodology successful through leadership.

About the Author:

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Dr. James T. Brown, president of SEBA[®] Solutions Inc., a Registered Education Provider for the Project Management Institute, has provided training and consulting services for dozens of companies nationally and internationally. SEBA[®] Solutions also provides OnePdu.com <http://onepdu.com> for online project management training. A recognized authority in project management, Dr. Brown is a frequently invited speaker on project management areas of interest. He is the author of *The Handbook of Program Management* published by McGraw Hill and is a member of the Project Management Institute and the National Speakers Association. Dr. Brown has a patent for a project scheduling methodology, and has received numerous awards including "Engineer of the Year" from the Cape Canaveral Technical Societies and is a recipient of the "NASA Public Service Medal" for exceptional contributions to NASA's mission. He is a member of the Project Management Institute and the National Speakers Association. He has a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida, a MS in Engineering Management from Florida Institute of Technology and a BS in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee State University. He is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE), a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and a certified speaking professional (CSP). To learn more about SEBA[®] visit www.sebasolutions.com. You can contact James directly at jtbrown@sebasolutions.com.

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