

PM WORLD TODAY – VIEWPOINTS – MAY 2008

You're a PMP, But... Are You a Project Management Professional?

By Lee R. Lambert, PMP

In the last five months I have had the opportunity to speak to over 2,000 Project Management Professionals (PMPs) in Anaheim, Hartford and Orlando. During those sessions I conducted non-scientific polls to determine the depth and breadth of the application of the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) standards to which this group had been tested for this prestigious professional certification.

Frankly, I was shocked with the results of my simple survey. Fundamentally, I sought two pieces of input: 1) how many of the PMPs were consistently utilizing the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) as described in PMBOK on their projects and; 2) how many were implementing the Precedence Diagramming Method (PDM) using the WBS Work Packages to determine logic relationships/work flow.

When asked to simply raise their hand if their response to my verbal query was affirmative, the data distribution among the 2,000 plus respondents was as follows:

WBS--a total of 31 (less than 2%) PMPs raised their hands

PDM--a total of 19 (less than 1%) PMPs raised their hands

Interpretation: As a profession, we've got a problem! We have far too many individuals who have worked hard, attended the best project management training and invested time and money in earning their PMP credential but now are admittedly not adhering to the very standards to which they were tested and should be held accountable.

The reason I chose the WBS and PDM as the basis for my study was that these two concepts are at the heart of successful project management. Without proper and dedicated attention to developing these two "products" from the myriad tools and techniques available to today's project management professional in planning and executing a project, the reality is the rest may well be "smoke and mirrors".

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First, let's examine the potential of the proper use of the WBS.

Most PMPs would admit that one of the biggest challenges facing them in successfully delivering the traditional triple constraint is the lack of clarity of scope definition and/or requirements clarification. The careful use of the WBS concept will reduce or eliminate this problem by providing the framework to decompose the work/deliverables to a size that significantly enhances the clarity and articulation of expectations among all involved parties—thus creating the basis for one of the most important components of PM— measurement of status/accomplishment over time. The smaller the work package, the more precisely status can be measured based upon objective indicator milestones with designated completion criteria.

Additionally, the more clarity in the work content/requirements the more effectively "skill set match" can be achieved and the impacts of skill set mismatch caused by resource capability/availability constraints can be evaluated and the impact on the project's timing and cost can be calculated using:

Duration Impact: (Effort/Productivity) divided by Resource Availability

Cost Impact: Effort/Productivity X Resource Rate

The benefits of the well developed WBS are not limited to an individual project. The Enterprise Project benefits become obvious as individual project data can be "merged" to facilitate project prioritization based on resource capacity and work load conditions which can be quickly assessed and vital decisions made as to resource assignments based on mission critical projects criteria. Add to all of these advantages of the effective implementation of the WBS concept the significantly improved ability to identify and manage change as it occurs on the project and you can begin to see why the WBS is at the heart of productive use of the project management process.

Now, let's examine the benefits associated with the appropriate use of the PDM concept.

The only way to reliably determine the duration of any project is to develop a realistic work flow built upon the WBS work package output. The PDM

allows the project manager to articulate the output-input relationships of all work content. Once the basic “logic” of the work flow is established, estimated durations are assigned to each work package (based on the resources assigned or the best resource assignment assumptions) thus enabling a forward pass/backward pass to be completed. PDM is NOT a Bar Chart. Bar Charts are created as an output of a well developed PDM!

Once the “foundational” logic network is created, the ability to optimize work flow relationships and assess impacts of resource “bait and switch” decisions, modification of logic relationships-- such as overlapping or fast-tracking is obvious. Additionally, the impacts of the work package’s actual status as the project evolves can be input and a meaningful “cause and effect” analysis can be accomplished to determine the need for further optimization or corrective action to assure the project’s schedule remains achievable. These actions include decisions regarding the determination of float utilization and the assessment of the potential for any given float path becoming a NEW critical path.

Add to these benefits, the Enterprise advantage of being able to significantly improve the ability to manage a fixed resource base in a multi-project, shared-resource and or constrained resource environment that results from the “merging” of individual project PDM information into an Enterprise-wide resource utilization data base.

Using the WBS and PDM tools of our trade is NOT an option! If we are to provide the perceived (expected) benefits associated with the earning of the PMP designation, then we must practice what we preach. We must become proactive in proving the value of using the tools of the trade—not just talking about them.

PMPs must lead the way in transforming great training into even greater action on their projects. The PMP must make a concerted effort to educate up the organization to assure the critical decision makers are aware of the substantial benefits to be realized from using the fundamental tools of the profession—the WBS and PDM.

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Lee R. Lambert, PMP, PMI PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDER OF THE YEAR 2007. In the profession of Project Management, Lee R. Lambert, PMP has established the standard against which others in the field are measured. Throughout a fast-paced 18 year corporate career with Chicago Bridge & Iron, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, General Electric (Nuclear Reactor Division) and Battelle Memorial Institute--where he worked almost exclusively with engineers and scientists--he quickly ascended to senior management positions and was responsible for the development and implementation of ground-breaking, sophisticated Enterprise project management processes for Engineering, Medical Diagnostics and Research & Development. In 1981, as a result of his pragmatic application of the PM methodologies, he was invited to be an integral part of the creation of the Project Management Institute's (PMI) Project Management Professional (PMP) Certification Program. He is a recipient of the PMI's Distinguished Contribution Award and was a member of the PMNetwork/PM Journal Editorial Review team for over a decade. He also contributed as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the PMI's Earned Value Management System (EVMS) Practice Standard. Educated as a Mechanical Engineer, he is a holder of a Master's Certificate in Project Management from George Washington University. He most recently has been awarded one of the PMI's highest honors for his ground breaking applied learning programs: The Professional Development Provider of the Year 2007. As an author of two books and 32 professional papers, no other project management educator/speaker can contend with his uncanny technical knowledge, material content and refreshing and entertaining delivery—his hard-hitting, but humorous style, has mesmerized more than 40,000 students in 22 countries. In May, Wiley Publishing retained Lee as author of PMP Prep A-

All-In-One Desk Reference Guide. Lee takes the saying; "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt" to a new level. Lee can be reached at Lee@LambertConsultingGroup.com.