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PMBOK version 4 - changes needed...!

By **Kumar Sarma**

During my coaching/training sessions with varied audience, it always crosses in my mind that the PMBOK can be simplified/expanded and rewritten in many places. In this article I am taking up the **first few pages** of the PMBOK and explaining my corresponding viewpoint.

Some Sections taken from the PMBOK and my corresponding viewpoint..

1) In section 1.2 the definition of project is that - “it is a temporary endeavor to create a unique product, service or result”. Further quoting “temporary does not generally apply to product, service or result created by the project”. Temporary has been defined in PMBOK as something which has got a definite beginning & definite end.

My viewpoint - *we need to understand that everything in this world is temporary. Just because the product, service or result needs to last for longer time does not change it's definition to anything other than 'temporary'. The products, services or results continue to be temporary only that it has an extended duration.*

2) In section 1.2, “every project creates a unique product, service or result and the repetition does not change the fundamental uniqueness of project work”. An example has been taken about a construction of building with different design, location, contractors etc.

My viewpoint - *we need to keep in mind that every moment of time is unique and anything that is built on top of time will be temporary & unique, so mostly everything a living person does in his life is a project because it would satisfy the terms temporary & unique and uses the PDCA(plan-do-check-act) cycle or it's variants like PDSA(plan-do-study-act),PDRA(plan-do-reflect-act),PDMA(plan-do-meditate-act) etc.*

3) In section 1.3 project management is “defined as the application of knowledge, skills, tools & techniques to project activities to meet project requirements”.

My viewpoint - *We need to keep in the mind that the attitude of people plays an important part in the success/failure of projects. Many of the projects that fail can be traced to the attitudes of stakeholders involved in the project and not on knowledge & skills. In simple words*

Knowledge - what to do

Skill - How to do

Attitude - want to do (this would override the knowledge, skills most of the times!)

4) In section 2.2 - Project vs Operation work-“ Project is temporary & unique, whereas operation is ongoing”.

My viewpoint - *considering in the light of what we discussed earlier in this article, there appears to little or no differences between project & operational work. Operational work can never be ongoing. They are also temporary. The lifecycle of operational work is dependent on the life of product, service or result and we should understand that products, service or result are also temporary though they should have an extended lifetime.*

5) In chapter 3 - One of the main jobs of a project team is defined as “balance the competing demands of scope, time, cost, quality, risk & resources to produce a product, service or result”.

My viewpoint - *Though PMBOK says what needs to be done, we need to remember that it is practically impossible to balance all the aspects mentioned above. The suggestion that needs to be given to the people would be to work from their circle of influence (pls refer my previous articles in PM World Today) to engage in proper planning and get the competing demands/constraints be slightly relaxed from the customer if the expectation was unrealistic, then work with the slightly relaxed constraints to improve the success of the project.*

6) In chapter 4 I do not see change requests being an output of develop project charter, develop project management plan process.

My viewpoint - *change requests can happen anytime for any process.*

7) **My viewpoint** - *I'm also surprised to see that there is no chapter on professional ethics and social responsibility in the PMBOK Guide. Considering the state of affairs of the economy and the impact the projects create on the world as a whole, professional ethics and social responsibility should be given a chapter of any book (professional in particular) not just the PMBOK. Moreover ethics & responsibility is also covered in the exam!*

Though the number of people passing the PMP exam has gone up exponentially, the project success however continues to be in lower scale. If the PMBOK addresses the reality like the way I have tried to attempt in this article it would be better for all. A supplementary guide which highlights the Best practices in successful projects would help people in a much better way to use the PMBOK and not just for clearing the PMP exam!

We also need to keep in mind that science and an objective way of approach does not solve the root causes of problems present in projects. Science can only define a problem and scratch the surface; it takes an artistic project manager to solve the “Root Causes” of problems seen in projects, which would have to do mostly with people issues.

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- 1) <http://www.pmworldtoday.net/viewpoints/2010/jan/VP-SARMA-CircleofInfluence.html>
- 2) <http://www.pmworldtoday.net/viewpoints/2010/feb/VP-SARMA-CircleofInfluence.html>
- 3) <http://www.pmworldtoday.net/tips/2008/aug.htm>
- 4) <http://www.pmforum.org/library/tips/2008/PDFs/Sarma-10-08.pdf>