

Project Management Training. . .

the **BIG** vs. the small **Answer**

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You've done your homework and you can't believe the range of answers you are getting. It's a simple question, really. You want to upgrade the Project Management skills for your people. When you ask for a training approach, some vendors suggest a program that can last over thirty days spanning as many as seven weeks. Other training vendors respond to the same request with a far more modest curriculum and a much lower total cost.

These vendors, while at extreme odds in their proposals, seem quite credible and offer an impressive list of clients. Do you go for the big answer with its related financial and people-time costs or is the more compact approach best for you? Are the big answer people trying to take advantage of the industry-wide awakening to the Project Management discipline? Is the smaller approach too simplistic to ever yield any benefits for your organization? Which approach is right?

Actually, either approach can be absolutely valid. The answer to this perplexing situation is based more on

what you are trying to accomplish than on who you are talking to. The right answer for you depends on 1) what type of projects are you doing, 2) are your projects stable and predictable or highly dynamic, 3) how much granularity do you need in your project plans, and 4) who must be involved in the management of these projects?

Only after you have answered these questions can you accurately decide on an appropriate Project Management training approach for your organization.

Project Type

Project Management first became a respected discipline due to a very specific type of work. Based on the lessons of the Industrial Revolution and

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spurred on by consumer demands for low-cost goods, organizations invested in creating high-production assembly lines that give us everything from toasters to transmissions. These *continuous efforts* are

based on highly predictable, repetitive processes. Industrial Engineers apply rigorous planning techniques to find even the smallest improvements that can provide meaningful savings over time.

To support such an environment, Project Management incorporated a host of tools and techniques to support detailed planning and rigorous time measurements. In other words, the BIG answer. That proven formula hasn't changed very much. Making improvements to the assembly line still requires this degree of Project Management expertise.

Modern organizations, however, are finding that they are dealing with a far different type of project . . . the *single-time effort*. These projects are usually performed only once or a very limited number of times instead of the traditional "mass" production. These projects follow custom production processes and typically result in totally unique products. Organizations may no longer depend on making fine improvements to the product and production process over time. The end products of a single-time effort must be right the first time.

If your organization is dependent on the successful completion of these single-time efforts, a more focused and concise approach to Project Management is in order. This modified, or modernized, perspective must be based upon proven traditional methods, but rely less on planning detail and more on plan iteration.

Project Dynamics

Perhaps the most telling distinction between continuing efforts and single-time efforts is the stability of the project

environment. Continuing efforts expect stable scopes, repeatable work processes, defined skill levels, predictable execution times and known results. Due to the stable nature of these projects, it is reasonable to spend significant time creating a formal *baseline plan* that sees limited revision during the life of the project.

The most common phrase uttered on a single-time effort is, "We don't know." This reality applies to unclear and constantly changing scopes, new and untested or highly revised work processes, project members who are asked to play multiple and changing roles, widely variant performance times and final deliverables that are redefined during the life of the project. Baseline planning becomes much less significant as radical change becomes the norm.

For stable projects, such as continuing efforts, the more comprehensive approach to Project

Management makes sense, and is in fact, quite necessary. Dynamic single-time efforts, however, strangle under the weight of these approaches due to the high rate of change that must be accommodated. Extensive detail and rapid iteration don't make for very pleasant bed-fellows, no matter what software tool you are using.

Plan Granularity

Project Management depends on well-conceived plans, measured control against the plan and formal assessment. While all three are required, everything hinges on the plan. If the plan is flawed or unusable, control and assessment

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become strictly intuitive. Because the early use of this discipline was intended for highly repetitive or continuous efforts, planning tools were created to accommodate significant granularity. *Time Measurement Units (TMUs)* were commonly used to anticipate the level of detail that should be defined in the plan and then tracked during project control. Each TMU represents 1/100,000th of an hour. A task estimated to require 23 TMU should last 23/100,000ths of an hour. Such detailed tasks are completely reasonable if you are fine-tuning the assembly line that will be executed thousands of times.

Traditional, comprehensive Project Management training is generally based on this level of possible granularity.

With single-time efforts, it is rare that the project plan will record any work much smaller than a single day duration. In fact, many proven approaches now recommend partitioning the total effort into *work units* or *work packets* that may range anywhere from one to two weeks in duration. Far less planning skill and effort is required when producing such plans.

The degree of detail you need for project planning should be determined by your willingness to track actual performance to control the project. For single-time effort dominant organizations, the traditional understandings of detailed project planning causes confusion and wasted time. A higher-level application of the same planning concepts becomes far more appropriate.

Due to their dynamic nature, project plans for single-time efforts require constant correction and revision as the project takes yet another unexpected turn. Updating overly detailed plans becomes impractical and is usually ignored. Organizations trying to force detailed planning techniques on these "one-of" projects are now right back where they started . . . without meaningful project plans.

Breadth of Influence

Because Project Management initially targeted the detailed and stable world of

continuing efforts, a great deal of individual and extensive training was recommended. Such education was offered exclusively to professional Project

Managers or Project Engineers. They created the plans that everyone else followed.

In single-time efforts, project planning becomes a total organization issue. Executive management (general business and technical) must help define project objectives, approve project strategies and then rule on any new directions that are required for some new approach or capability. Team members represent their individual and specialized expertise when helping to devise a strategy for the project. Further, team members are no longer limited to people with advanced, technical skills. Subject matter experts are routinely recruited from the general business audience as critical resources to the project. Traditional Project Managers also find their role changing. As they no longer have the knowledge or expertise to accurately anticipate all the situations a

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project may encounter, the Project Manager now *facilitates* planning sessions with team members and other experts instead of disappearing into their office until the plan is done.

As this breadth of influence is so large, Project Management training can no longer be targeted to an exclusive few, but must include all who will have a direct voice in the planning, control or assessment of a project. For organizations who are attempting to create innovative, custom products in a timely manner, you will find that you must target this training to a much larger and more diverse audience. Exposing that group to comprehensive Project Management training is exhausting, expensive and wasted.

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Summary

Project Management is changing to address the needs of emerging single-time efforts. As the process changes, so must our training strategies. One thing is very clear, running all your people through training on your favorite Project Management software tool adds very little value to the organization until these issues are addressed. It is similar to handing someone a new CAD (Computer-Aided Design) package when they have little understanding of basic architecture and design. Yet many organizations blindly follow this simplistic strategy instead of addressing the real problems.

If your organization supports repetitive, consistent continuing efforts as a dominant way of life, you will need to

identify a limited number of project professionals and expose them to comprehensive and traditional Project Management training.

If, on the other hand, your organization is becoming reliant on the benefits of single-time efforts, a reduced version of Project Management techniques fits the bill. This training, though, should be secondary to a more significant topic . . . creating an environment that enables Project Management to

work across the total organization. This discussion must include a framework for how projects will be initiated, executed and then brought to completion. Expected roles and responsibilities must be defined to insure that a valid Project Organization is in place for each effort.

Selected individuals may still benefit from some of the more "in-depth" training. However, "sheep-dipping" everyone through an extensive curriculum may actually have a reverse effect on your organization as people tire of the over-exposure to topics they will never really use. The entire exercise may become viewed as good theory but impractical.

What if you do both kinds of projects? It then becomes imperative that you differentiate between the two and adopt strategies that respond to the unique characteristics of each. Failure to do so is worse than doing nothing. It imposes unrealistic demands and expectations on an already stressed work environment. And we prove John Naisbitt's warning from the pages of *Megatrends*, "Without

an appreciation of the larger shifts that are restructuring our society, we act on assumptions that are out of date. Out of touch with the present, we are doomed to fail in the unfolding future."

Modern Project Management can help pave the way for this future. Effective

training can help us rethink irrelevant approaches while reinforcing a new way of doing business. We must remain sensitive to any new assumptions that support the work of today's organization . . . and refine our understanding of Project Management.

The Tryon and Associates Answer

Tryon and Associates has offered Project Management training and consulting since 1985 to some of the largest (and some of the smallest) organizations in the United States, Canada and Europe. Our courses originally targeted the Information Technology industry, where single-time efforts are the norm. Since 1990, however, our seminars have been used by organizations who specialize in research and development, product development, marketing, general business and plant operations. While many of these companies continue to perform continuous efforts, they are shifting their focus to single-time efforts.

*The **Tryon and Associates** curriculum has been crafted just for this expanded audience with concise, focused material that provides the type and level of knowledge needed to perform these modern projects. **Managing Single-Time Efforts** proves valuable for every segment of an organization that is part of the project effort. Designated Project Managers, Team Members and interested management continue on to the planning, control and assessment tools of **Project Management Fundamentals**.*

The right amount of education in a compressed period of time for the complete project audience . . . and at an affordable cost.

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