

BEST PRACTICES

Avoid poorly administered projects

Project management needs discipline and processes for the firm to move forward.

By LIISA SULLIVAN
Correspondent

You finally landed that big project, but now it seems to be going off track. Why did this happen? What can you do to get things back on track?

NURTURE STAFF. Ceilidh Higgins, senior interior architect, **Daryl Jackson, Robin Dyke Architects** (Sydney, AU), a firm of approximately 30 employees, says that good management and delivery of projects is what makes the difference between a successful consulting practice and one that is not.



Ceilidh Higgins,
Senior Interior
Architect,
Daryl Jackson,
Robin Dyke
Architects.

“It’s evident that a practice that manages projects well is going to make more money, and this is the reason why most practices would believe they need to change or improve their project management, administration and delivery,” Higgins says. “However, poor management, administration and delivery have a much higher

cost than the initial obvious impact on your individual project’s bottom line. There are many hidden costs to your business as a result, and in my view, the biggest one is the costs associated with staff satisfaction and retention.”

Higgins says that most people don’t enjoy working in a chaotic environment where they feel they have no understanding of the end goals or the overall timeframe. While deadlines can sometimes drive a team to action, a team under constant deadline pressure

with no understanding of the full picture beyond what documents need to be issued “right now,” quickly becomes disillusioned. Consequently, quality starts to suffer, rework becomes the norm and the risk of insurance claims increases. Mentoring and training of staff suffers too.

“Your practice system needs to be a living system that learns from every project, every mistake and every team member – no matter how junior.”

“In the end, staff leaves (or worse – ends up on sick or stress leave) and the cost of replacing them is borne by another future project,” Higgins says.

Benoit Hardy-Vallee, a consultant for Gallup, a research and analytics firm, says that when it comes to project management, most organizations put their practices before their people. They place more emphasis on rational factors – the process itself – and less on emotional drivers that could lead to project excellence – like their employees’ engagement with the project and company.

“Project managers should consider the emotional needs of team members and stakeholders, rather than relying on rational processes alone,” he says.

RALLY TOGETHER AND THEN REVIEW. To avoid the problems described above, Higgins recommends that firms create clear goals and check in often. Here are three tips:

1) Map it out. Create a project schedule or program that communicates with the whole team and the client the major

STUDY SHOWS MORE WORK NEEDS TO BE DONE

A recent study from the Project Management Institute, Pulse of the Profession, shows that both the public and the private sector have work to do in effectively aligning program management with organizational strategy and mission. More than half of government respondents (52 percent) acknowledged that they frequently focus on their specific departmental performance objectives as opposed to the strategic goals of the organization or agency.

Only 37 percent of government respondents reported that their organization has a formal process for developing program management competency and only 25 percent reported having a defined career path for those engaged in project and program management.

So, overall, aligning with organizational strategy and understanding what it takes to become a high performer – completing 80 percent or more of projects on time, on budget and within goals – can improve an organization’s outcomes.

tasks that need to be accomplished. This should include a list of who will achieve which goals and by when. Everyone should be held accountable to a program once it’s agreed upon.

2) Review and restructure as needed.

The next challenge is to meet the agreed upon program. Every job will be different, but common issues will rise across projects. If final reviews always seem to take longer than expected or generate more comments and issues than anticipated, then maybe you need to restructure your review process to allow for early inputs and staged reviews by these staff.

3) Consider automation.

If there are many manual tasks that are being done over and over, are time-consuming and prone to error (for example

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GOOD TO KNOW

Over a quarter of firms (28 percent) track project rework.
Firms most often perform rework because of unclear/incorrect scope (50 percent).

Source: 2013 Project Management Study, ZweigWhite: www.zweigwhite.com/p-2160-project-management-survey-2013

AWARDS

2013 marketing awards announced

The Zweig Letter recognizes entries in seven categories.

ZweigWhite has announced the winners of **THE ZWEIG LETTER** 2013 Marketing Communications Excellence Awards. The awards recognize exceptional marketing efforts in the architecture, engineering, planning, and environmental consulting industry.

A panel of judges composed of industry practitioners and marketing communications professionals assessed each entry based on results achieved (such as increased leads, more inbound inquiries, new projects, etc.), as well as creativity and marketing objectives.

TOP FINISHERS FOR EACH OF THE SEVEN CATEGORIES

External Newsletter

1. Urban Engineers, Inc.
2. SWCA, Inc.
3. Short Elliott Hendrickson, Inc.

Integrated Marketing Campaign

1. Hickock Cole Architects
2. Delcan Corporation (Employee Communication Program)
3. Delcan Corporation (Rail & Transit Campaign)
4. Process Plus, LLC

Online Marketing

1. Perkins + Will Engineers, Inc.
2. Miyamoto International

Social Media

1. Miyamoto International
2. Finley Engineering Group, Inc.

Special Event Marketing Campaign

1. P2S Engineering, Inc.
2. Urban Engineers, Inc.
3. Woolpert, Inc.
4. Hanson Professional Services Inc.

Target Marketing

1. Baskervill
2. CSArch
3. Finley Engineering Group, Inc.

Web Site

1. MacKay Sposito
2. SmithGroup JJR
3. FUSE International

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transmittals), you need to think about whether there are ways you can automate these tasks.

DEBRIEFINGS HELP. The three points above demonstrate some key ways to improve your project management and administration – a process known as “continuous improvement.”

“Your practice system needs to be a living system that learns from every project, every mistake and every team member – no matter how junior,” Higgins says.

She adds that project debriefing meetings are not common enough in most firms; they should occur on every project, regardless of size, and these debriefings should be a time for sharing and congratulations, for recording positive achievements, and discussing how problems could be avoided next time.

“These debriefings shouldn’t be a finger-pointing exercise,” Higgins says. “Often, the best time to hold these sessions is right after design documentation is complete. If you wait ’till the end of construction, people’s memories are not fresh. On some projects it may be necessary to have a further discussion post construction – and if you do – try to involve the contractor in this session.”

In some cases, involving the client can be a great way to build an ongoing relationship and demonstrate a firm’s commitment to improving services.

“Imagine if on every project you could just do one thing better each time – over the course of a year that adds up to a lot of improvements,” Higgins says. ▀▀

Note: Ceilidh Higgins blogs about collaboration on the practice of interior design, architecture and multidisciplinary consulting. Her blog can be found here: www.theMidnightLunch.com.

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