

# Best Practices Panel November 4, 2006 SW Ohio PMI Professional Development session at DeVry

Contributors:  
Ann Russell, Rhonda Schwartz

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# 1. Introduction

The following Best Practices were collected or developed and then discussed as part of the Panel Discussion / Workshop on November 4, 2006.

The session was divided into three parts, and the participants were divided into three teams. In the first part, three teams were asked to discuss different topics. In the second part, the teams were all asked to discuss Project Closure.

The practices documented below contain the input of all the teams.

## 2. Practices

### 2.1 Project Execution

#### 2.1.1 Aspects

The team considered many very important aspects of project execution

- Communication Management
- Resource management
- QA processes/systems
  - Acceptance criteria developed by solution owners
- CM processes/systems
  - Scope control
  - Management escalation criteria
- Project Management Information System
- Risk Management

#### 2.1.2 Stakeholders

The team determined the critical best practice is:

Keeping Stakeholders Engaged in Project Visibility During Execution

- Project Dashboard
- Continual, not continuous, communications
  - Regularly scheduled communications
  - Develop processes that work, and discipline to follow processes
  - KISS and WIIFM (for stakeholders)
- Continual marketing of project (“Is this still what you want?”)

#### 2.1.3 Scope Definition

- Clearly describe tasks
- Need to contain requirements due to business owner scope creep; clearly state what is NOT included.
- In SOW, need to define deliverable and timeframe of activities
- Start with sponsor of the project. If time is limited with executive sponsor then put a communication plan in place so that executive sponsor can keep abreast of scope
- Need to identify ALL the stakeholders – especially when multiple departments are affected. Communication plan key to the success of this
- Can’t address scope all by itself. Need to include multiple components

### **2.1.4 Role Definition**

- Clearly define the roles including stakeholders as well .
- Write role definition with specific skill sets and present to customer. Do this in initiating phase if possible.
- Need team member who is willing participant and management support of this.
- Need resource plan that specifies time commitment needed.
- Back up plan for resources needed.
- PM needs to ensure team members from each discipline are represented.
- Internal review of requirements to identify that the appropriate team members are assigned.
- PM needs to request additional or different resources when appropriate.
- Issue: Key staff assigned to multiple projects. Mitigation: Hold functional/resources managers accountable for providing staff.
- Communication plan to include need for additional staff and/or staffing issues.
- Cross application projects – problem with role definition.
- Consider including staff who are outside of their role. Leads to team spirit. Teamwork is important.

### **2.1.5 Risk Planning**

- Escalation path needs to be defined in initial phase of project.
- Initiating phase to assess the risks including all team members.
- Resource constraints need to be included in that risk assessment session.
- Create calendar/vision map to represent resource availability and milestones due at that time. Makes it visible.
- Define mitigation actions at same time so when risk becomes an issue, it is a matter of executing the pre-defined tasks, not figuring what to do at the time.
- Risk planning up front may also lead to taking a different approach to approach.

### **2.1.6 Communication**

- The most important thread addressed throughout of the above
- How keep tasks on time – frequent communication and reporting

What else affects project execution – extraneous factors – takes you back to prioritization with funding departments. “Do we continue or not?”

### **2.1.7 Project Reporting - High Level**

- Project name/purpose/description/sponsor/PM
- Overall Project status: Red Green Yellow
- Milestones/Due Dates-Status
- Major accomplishments since last reporting period
- Budget Status
- Major Unresolved Issues
- Major Risks
- Next steps (upcoming activities)

### **2.1.8 Project Reporting - Detail**

- Master Issues List (Opened/Closed)
- Action Items
- Risks
- Schedule / Resources

- Budget (EV SPI CPI)

## **2.2 Project Control**

This section covers best practices in project control. In many ways project control is the most important key the project manager has to execute and successfully close projects. Some project management authors believe that control is really the most important, if not only, job a project manager really has during execution and closeout. The two areas you need to be most concerned with during execution and closeout are control of quality and scope.

### **2.2.1 Control of Quality**

Quality of the deliverables is a major factor in gaining final acceptance. It cannot be inspected or tested in after the fact. Quality needs to be defined up front. Then metrics, based on the detailed requirements of each deliverable as well as the entire system, can be determined that will allow the project manager to measure and assess the quality of each deliverable. This will require an agreed-to definition of what constitutes Red, Yellow and Green status. Iterative testing based on a Master Test Plan is a best practice. The Iteration Test Plans should describe the detailed test targets based on the acceptance testing criteria as follows:

- Visual Test
- Code Review
- Functional Test
- Load Test.

Adjustments to your processes are done based on the metrics you have adopted with an eye toward continuous quality improvement until you reach the agreed definition of quality of each deliverable and the system. It is not a best practice to ever say, “That is good enough.” It is a good practice to say, “That meets the requirements.”

### **2.2.2 Scope Control – a.k.a. Change Management**

Change management is an ongoing process that really starts when the project starts. It is the enemy of scope creep. It is based on a pre-change process that includes the following:

- Get the scope right at the outset. Not just what is included but what is not included.
- Get the requirements right with a detailed analysis
- Get the stakeholders right by getting agreement on the requirements
- Get the schedule right. Stakeholder and team consensus is a key to this.
- Assess the external factors especially the risks.
- Clearly delineate all assumptions for stakeholders.
- Establish a change management process and stick to it.

Elements of best practices in the change management process are as follows:

- Define what constitutes a change and how to request it
- Plan on applying Conflict Management principles
- Define escalation strategies
- Put contingency funds in budget based on defined risks
- Communicate change management process to all stakeholders and team members
- Stick to the process, no matter what the situation
- Communicate results of all change requests
- Change requests should have the following elements:
  - Name of requestor

- Date
- Priority
- Description
- Expected impact on schedule, and any risks
- Expected impact on budget
- Expected impact on resources
- Keep a change control log for each project. Elements to include are:
  - Project name
  - Project number
  - Request number
  - Date
  - Description
  - Priority
  - Assigned to:
  - Status (Open/Closed)
  - Final Determination (including who made the determination and the rationale)
- Record lessons learned as they are learned, not at the end of the project.

### **2.2.3 Tools for Control**

Tools that can be of use to the project manager, if used properly and consistently are:

- Earned Value  
Although not widely used at present, earned value is a good tool for monitoring the progress of your project in terms of schedule, and budget for work performed vs. work planned. Earned value will not only validate your “gut feel” for the project but will help set expectations for and support reporting to stakeholders. MS Project and other project tracking tools now contain earned value features.
- Critical Path Tracking and Analysis  
Constant monitoring of the critical path of your project allows you early recognition of events that threaten the schedule. This permits you to avoid unpleasant surprises and take action to get the project back on track as soon as it starts to lag behind.

### **2.2.4 Challenges to Control**

There are some challenges to be faced in project control. They are:

- Outsourced Projects – vendor managing the schedule and no visibility to the vendor’s project plan.
- Means to verify status reported on completeness and correctness of tasks
- Measuring service (quality) in terms of customer satisfaction.

The forgoing is only a partial list of challenges but they all have similar solutions related to the degree of understanding and involvement of upper management in supporting the project. So, the education of upper management on these challenges and their role in helping the project manager deal with or avoid them is a best practice.

## **2.3 Project Closure**

“Most of my Projects never get this far....”

Project closure is often overlooked. The following best practices suggest actions to be taken during planning, execution and closure of a project that assist in a successful end to a project.

### 2.3.1 Before

“Begin with the end in mind”

- Establish Both Project and Phase Closeout Criteria at Beginning of Project
  - Assemble the components and terms of the project Close Out in the planning phase of the project as the scope and deliverables are defined.
  - Identify up front who will provide on-going support.
  - The Close Out should formally define
    - the end of all the project work tasks,
    - the terms and conditions for acceptance of the deliverables
    - the transfer of ownership and responsibility of the products or services to the long term owners.
  - The terms and conditions of the Close Out should be approved by the owners at the start of the project and made a project deliverable.
- The close out should be made part of the work plan, a “mini-scope” defined of what tasks and documents are expected, and scheduled time allotted to completing these close out tasks.
  - The number of components and complexity of the close out will vary depending on the type of project and the deliverables that are produced.
  - Special Close Out conditions are sometimes added during the execution of the project due to unforeseen situations.
  - It is a common practice to retain five to ten percent till all work has been satisfactorily completed.
- Typical close out areas to plan for (not inclusive):
  - Acceptance – Terms of acceptance. (Performance criteria, etc.)
  - Administration Close Out – Transfer of operational and maintenance responsibilities from the project team to new owners. A formal acceptance document may be signed.
  - Contract Close Out – Verification that all contractual work has been satisfactory done and final payments approved.
  - Financial Close – Verification that all incurred costs for materials and labor have been paid and reported, etc. Closure of project accounts.
  - Technical Documents – Verification that project documentation has been received: product manuals, training manuals, prints, spare parts, warranties, etc.

### 2.3.2 During

“Continuous Improvement Results from Continuous Reflection”

- Phase Close-out - Verify Exit Criteria Periodically
  - Ensure all Phase Exit Criteria are met
  - Use a Checklist for Phase Specific Exit Criteria/Closeout
- Get Support group involved throughout the process, not just at the end
- Lessons Learned - (collect throughout the project while the experiences are fresh, not just during close out).
  - Collect, document and share
  - (Surveys, Post-It Notes, Anonymous, Happy Face versus Unhappy Face)
  - Process improvement opportunities.
  - What could have been done better?
  - Use for future projects

### 2.3.3 After

“Are we there yet?”

- Did we meet objectives/benefits of project?
  - All milestones completed?
    - All Issues/Risks/Action Items Addressed
    - Identify bugs and other open items. Plan for fixes.
  - Formal signoff/approval from client
    - Ensure All Requirements are Met
    - Follow-up call – “Are you satisfied?”
  - Realization of the benefits of the project
  - Provide tools to measure the benefits

“The job of the project manager is to finish things”

- Project Close-out Best Practices - Use a Checklist for Closeout phase
  - Follow through after project implementation
    - Confirm who will support, including Help desk/point person for questions
    - Support Documentation Created / Communicated
    - FAQ document
    - Carry out formalized knowledge transfer plans
    - Knowledge base of issues experienced during testing
    - Hold handoff meeting to appropriate department(s) and user(s)
    - Train users and technical group
  - Customer Feedback / Survey
  - Administrative Closeout
    - Transition Project Deliverable to Long-Term Owner
    - Lessons learned captured and shared
  - Financial Closeout
    - Purchase Orders Closed
    - Invoices Paid
    - Accounts Closed
    - Document warranty support from vendors
  - Project Closeout
    - Resources Released
    - Resource Competency / Skills Assessment to Resource Manager
  - Celebration!!