

What Makes a Great Project Manager?

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Introduction to this Conversation

- My Background
 - ◆ Commitment-based Management—member of founding team 25 years ago
 - ◆ Led consulting projects for 20 years for changing processes and culture
 - ◆ Coached (some great) leaders and project managers along the way
- The *Stratam* Group: *Strategic Alignment and Mobilization*
 - ◆ Boutique firm in the Bay Area started three years ago
 - ◆ Clients in biotech and high tech
 - ◆ We improve how our clients work together
 - ◆ Some colleagues here tonight
- Conversation Tonight
 - ◆ Stages of Learning
 - ◆ Project Managers at various stages
 - ◆ Commitment-based Management: some key distinctions for the advanced stages
- Invitation
 - ◆ Engage freely
 - ◆ My intention: You leave the evening with some insights that you appreciate

Stages of Learning

from Hubert L. Dreyfus's *On the Internet*

Rule Based Levels:

- Novice
 - ◆ Follows *rules*
 - ◆ Driving: “Shift to second when odometer needle points at 10”
 - ◆ PM: Record action items as spoken
- Advanced Beginner
 - ◆ Recognizes situational *aspects*; gains *maxims* for responding to them
 - ◆ Driving: “Shift up when the engine sounds like it’s racing”
 - ◆ PM: Ask for dates for all actions items, if not offered
- Competence
 - ◆ Chooses a perspective for what to pay attention to and what to ignore
 - ◆ Driving: When exiting a freeway, pays attention to car’s speed, not whether to shift gears
 - ◆ PM: Identify parts of the discussion requiring an action item and request one

Stages of Learning

from Hubert L. Dreyfus's *On the Internet*

Embodied and Intuitive Levels:

- Proficiency
 - ◆ Experience is assimilated in an embodied way, yet still requires decision-making
 - ◆ Driving: Rainy day, feels by the seat of his pants he is going too fast, still must decide how to react
 - ◆ PM: Guide conversations to areas requiring action and obtain commitments
- Expertise
 - ◆ Sees what needs to be done intuitively
 - ◆ Driving: On wet off-ramp with an emergency, appropriate action is taken without calculation
 - ◆ PM: Recognize weak aspects of a project immediately and convene conversations to take corrective action
- Mastery
 - ◆ Seeks opportunities to excel that are invisible to experts: creates new perspectives and new intuitive actions
 - ◆ Driving: Invents new driving tactics (purposeful skidding to reverse direction)
 - ◆ PM: Develop new core practices for the discipline

Project Management Areas of Focus: Early Levels (Novice to Competence)

- Standard Tools
 - ◆ MS Project or more advanced applications
 - ◆ SharePoint or other document libraries
 - ◆ Budgeting tools
- Basic Skills
 - ◆ Preparing for meetings and managing meetings
 - ◆ Laying out plans
- Common Practices
 - ◆ Types of meetings (e.g. project review meetings)
 - ◆ Capturing actions

Project Management Areas of Focus: Advanced Levels (Proficient and Above)

- Intentionality and Commitment
 - ◆ Key to all results
 - ◆ Individual accountability
- Interpretations (and their coordination)
 - ◆ Every observer has his/her own perspective
 - ◆ Listening for similarities and differences and navigating between them
- Identities and Concerns
 - ◆ Ambitions and anxieties are key drivers
 - ◆ Does the project give meaning to people?
- Trust (between parties)
 - ◆ Different interpretations + breakdowns + anxiety = breaks in trust
 - ◆ Continuous repair and strengthening
- Moods
 - ◆ Pervasive sense about what's possible
 - ◆ Lives in people's assessments, not the circumstances

Commitment-based Management: Distinctions for the Advanced Areas of Focus

- About Commitment-based Management
 - ◆ Created in early '80s by Dr. Fernando Flores and team
 - ◆ Applied philosophy (from Heidegger and Speech Act Theory)
- Communication *is* action
 - ◆ I invite you to lunch—a new future exists; our identities are altered
- Six universal classes of Communication Actions
 - ◆ Requests, offers, promises, declarations, assessments, assertions
- The communication actions provide a framework for distinguishing
 - ◆ Commitments
 - ◆ Interpretations
 - ◆ Identities
 - ◆ Trust
 - ◆ Moods

Communication Actions: The Universal Classes

Future Result

- ***Request***
 - ◆ Customer initiates action with a potential performer
 - ◆ Ex: Please review the meeting minutes and approve them by 5pm
- ***Offer***
 - ◆ Performer initiates action with a potential customer
 - ◆ Ex: Would you like me to review the latest data? I have time today
- ***Promise***
 - ◆ Performer commits him/herself to fulfillment
 - ◆ Ex: I'll have the assay complete by 5/21.

Good Requests (Offers, Promises) Can Answer these Questions

- Who is making the request? (*Requester or Customer*)
- To whom is he/she addressing the request? (*Performer*)
- What does he/she want? (*Conditions for Success*)
- When does he/she want it? (*Time*)
- Is the would-be performer the right person for the request?
 - ◆ Role
 - ◆ Skill
 - ◆ Capacity
- Does the performer really understand what is wanted?
(*Understanding of concerns plus shared “Background of Obviousness”*)
- Does the performer have the space to negotiate? (*Authentic possibility of commitment*)

The Commitment Cycle Behind Successful Action

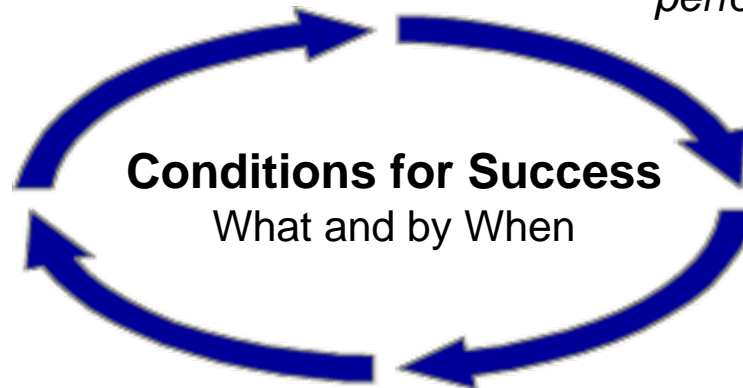
I. Preparation › Request

Customer shifts a concern into action by making a request

II. Co-Design › Promise

The two parties co-design the conditions for success and the performer makes a promise

Customer



Performer

IV. Evaluation › Acceptance

The customer evaluates what has been delivered, and if satisfied, accepts it

III. Execution › Report Delivery

The performer manages the actions necessary to fulfill the promise and delivers

The Request Commitment Cycle: Committed Moves

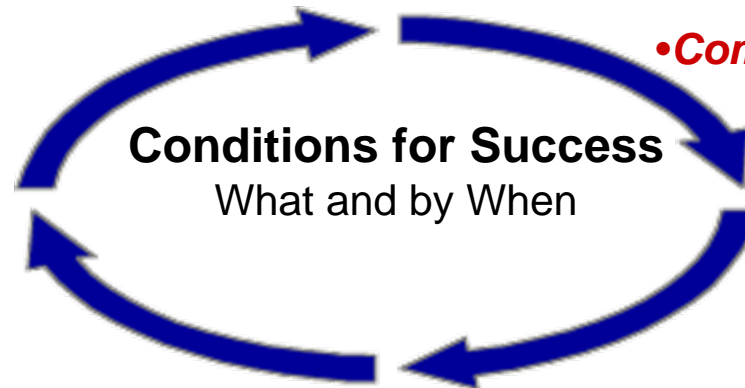
I. Preparation

- *Request*

II. Co-Design

- *Promise (Performer)*
- *Decline (P)*
- *Counter-offer (P)*
- *Commit-to-commit (P)*

Customer



Performer

IV. Evaluation

- *Accept (C)*
- *Reject (C)*

III. Execution

- *Cancel Request (C)*
- *Revoke Promise (P)*
- *Report Delivery (P)*

Communication Actions: The Universal Classes

Present Condition

- ***Declaration***
 - ◆ Speaker creates a new condition by virtue of his/her authority
 - ◆ Ex: We will not pursue that line of investigation.
- ***Assessment***
 - ◆ Speaker states a judgment or opinion about a condition
 - ◆ Ex: The experiments are not well thought through.
- ***Assertion***
 - ◆ Speaker presents a condition as true
 - ◆ Ex: *In vitro* testing indicated no activity.

Trust: An Assessment with Three Dimensions

- Sincerity
 - ◆ Is the person saying what he/she really intends to do?
- Competence
 - ◆ Does he/she have the necessary skill to fulfill the promise?
 - ◆ Is he/she assessing his/her capacity responsibly?
- Involvement/Care
 - ◆ Does he/she understand my real concerns about the situation?
 - ◆ Is he/she committed to taking care of my concerns (producing satisfaction) or only to fulfilling the task?

Moods

- Embodied *assessments* about the future
- Distinguished from emotions
 - ◆ Less obvious
 - ◆ Longer lasting
 - ◆ More pervasive
- Open and close different possibilities for action
- Contagious (particularly the negative ones)
- Leaders (and project managers) affect the moods of others (for better or worse)

Common Moods with Counterparts

Destructive Moods

- Confused
- Resigned
- Distrustful
- Overwhelmed
- Fearful
- Anxious
- Defensive
- Resentful
- Arrogant
- Impatient
- Competitive
- Judgmental
- Controlling

Constructive Moods

- Curious
- Ambitious
- Engaging
- “Dancing” or “being in the flow”
- Confident
- Calm
- Open
- Accepting
- Respectful
- Resolute
- Collaborative
- Appreciative
- Empowering

Some Negative Moods and their Assessments

- Resigned *It's bad and nothing will help*
- Distrustful *The others will undermine us*
- Overwhelmed *I cannot do it all (and I must)*
- Resentful *They'll pay for undervaluing me—I won't play hard and they'll realize their mistake*

Conclusions

- We learn in stages: at the more advanced stages, attention shifts to more subtle phenomena
- For advanced project managers, the subtle phenomena includes intentionality, interpretations, identities, moods, and trust
- These phenomena can be interpreted through *Commitment-based Management* in a manner that enables rapid learning and actionable interventions
- Celebrate the great project managers—they give people meaning while producing outstanding results—by cultivating more of them