When Not to Write a Report

Michael Thomsett suggests one way you can reduce the amount of work your division or department does each month: review the reports you issue and determine those reports you don't need to write!

In his book *The Little Black Book of Business Reports,* Thomsett suggests that a critical review of the reports your organization prepares monthly could lead to obvious ways to reduce your workload, such as:

■ **Consolidation.** Some reports can be combined, saving both writing and reading time.

■ **Simplification.** The current level of detail may be too much.

■ **Elimination.** Some reports can be done away with altogether. Too often, reports originally requested as one-time projects end up as recurring documents.

■ **Reduced frequency.** It may be enough to issue the report quarterly or semi-annually.

■ **Replacement.** You may be putting out a report with lots of facts about which no one cares.

■ **Hold a meeting.** Often, a report is issued to solve a problem, but that problem could be more effectively handled in a face-to-face meeting.

For more information about *The Little Black Book of Business Reports* and other AMA books, visit www.amanet.org/books. For more communication help, check out AMA's communication seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars

Project Management Is a Business Function

BY DENNIS BOLLES, PMP

Project management has the greatest impact on a customer's recognition of a vendor as a world-class leader in time-to-market, cost-to-market and quality-to-market. Meeting and exceeding customer expectations by completing projects successfully on a consistent basis is the reason for receiving excellence awards from most customers, which is the goal of every successful organization.

If projects are an integral part of your doing business, you should be clear about what a project is and isn't and what is required to complete a project to a customer's satisfaction.

If executives and functional heads recognize that managing projects has a significant impact on an organization's bottom line, and the ability to successfully manage projects is dependent upon the proper application of specific knowledge, skill, tools and techniques, doesn't it make sense that such an important business function be established at the executive management level of the organization? How else can a company ensure that projects are managed well across the organization, and that strategically critical projects are given the best opportunity to succeed from the very start?

Positioning the project management function in a hierarchical organization establishes the degree of authority, acceptance, adoption, autonomy and thus "ownership" of the responsibility for establishing, distributing, supporting and managing project management best practices within a company.

Enterprise-wide adoption of project management best practices calls for single ownership of the function. Establishing common practices across an organization at all levels is very difficult, if not impossible, without a sole owner being identified. Ownership must be recognized as an independent business function at the highest level of the organization to enable the authority,

AMA Survey Facts

The Human Resource Institute, in conjunction with the American Management Association, conducted the Performance Review Training Practitioner Consensus in August 2005. Survey results showed:

85.6% of respondents provide training for supervisors on conducting performance reviews.

87.4% train supervisors on how to phrase feedback properly to avoid legal situations.

93.5% train supervisors on appropriate documentation.

For more information, visit www.hrinstitute.info

A State-of-the-Art Approach to Succession Planning and Management

BY WILLIAM J. ROTHWELL

What characteristics do state-of-the-art succession planning and management (SP&M) programs share in common?

As you review your own efforts in this area, it is worthwhile to consider this list of ten key traits:

CHARACTERISTIC 1: Top management participation and support. Top management involvement must be strongly evident. Its personal involvement should motivate participants and ensure that other members of the management team devote time and effort to the succession planning program.

CHARACTERISTIC 2: Needs-driven with external benchmarking. Some effort should be made to compare best practices in other organizations.

CHARACTERISTIC 3: Focused attention. Organization leaders should not allow succession planning to occur casually on its own. A systematic effort is focused on accelerating the development of individuals with verified advancement potential. It is worth emphasizing that it is not appropriate to assume that successful performance at one level guarantees success at higher levels of responsibility.

CHARACTERISTIC 4: Dedicated responsibility. If a goal deserves attention, someone must be held responsible for achieving it and accountable for the consequences of it. That is as true of SP&M as it is of anything else.

CHARACTERISTIC 5: Succession planning and management extends to all levels. Note that the greatest emphasis is placed in some organizations at the lowest management levels. In other cases, attention is devoted to levels where business needs (or risks of loss due to retirement) are greatest.

CHARACTERISTIC 6: A systematic approach. In most organizations, continuing processes should be put in place to focus attention on succession planning.

CHARACTERISTIC 7: A comparison of present performance and future potential. Management succession should not be a function of personal favoritism, seniority or even demonstrated track record. Instead, the organization should possess some means by which to compare present job performance and future potential.

CHARACTERISTIC 8: Clarification of high-level replacement needs. The organization should identify development time spans for specific key positions.

CHARACTERISTIC 9: An obligation to identify and prepare successors. Each executive should take responsibility, and be held accountable, for identifying and preparing successors.

CHARACTERISTIC 10: Specific development programs established and conducted. Individuals thought to have high potential should participate in planned development programs to prepare them for the future, without necessarily being promised anything. Such programs may be viewed in three stages, based on the level of participants' experience with the organization.

In the first stage, there is a relatively large pool of prospective high potentials that is taught general management skills. Only 6 percent make it to the next stage where they participate in tailor-made development experiences, intensive on-the-job development and specialized courses, and they occupy important positions. A smaller percentage of those in the next stage progresses to the third and final stage, where they occupy important positions while they are carefully groomed for more senior positions.

Project Management Is a Business Function *continued from preceding page*

acceptance, adoption and autonomy that are required to establish, monitor and control the distribution of disciplines required to achieve enterprise-wide project management capabilities.

Establishing a project management enterprise within a company is a significant undertaking and may meet with resistance at various levels of the organization for many different reasons. One of the major reasons is the most obvious, but it is seldom given sufficient consideration. People generally resist changes in life because they do not understand why the changes are necessary or how they will impact them. Most prefer maintaining the status quo to doing something new, especially when it involves how they perform their work.

So communicating the benefits of establishing project management as a business function to all levels of the organization is a critical step in making it happen.

Boss Management BY MARK VICKERS

Boss management has always been important, but it has seldom been more compelling.

There are at least a couple of reasons for this. First, many—probably most—workers hold their jobs at the discretion of their bosses. Even with today's legislative guarantees, employees are increasingly on their own when dealing with bosses. Second, collaboration has become the watchword of the day—not only across organizations but up and down.

Employees at every level need to support their boss and the organization's mission. The cost of not doing so can be considerable.

People Management

In a recently republished *Harvard Business Review* classic article, authors John J. Grabarro and John P. Kotter point to the example of a company that lost from $2 million to $5 million as a result of a poor working relationship between an executive and one of his direct reports. This wasn't just a matter of a personality conflict, they note. The boss lacked good people-management skills, something that the subordinate manager should have compensated for because he and his boss needed to work effectively together.

In many cases, subordinates dealing with a difficult boss will avoid him or her altogether and try to get their jobs done on their own. In his new book, *Was Your Boss Raised by Wolves?*, HRI Executive-in-Residence and former Corporate Vice President of People Resources for Cigna Corporation Gerald M. Groe calls this "boss phobia." He argues that people who are truly afraid of their boss wind up communicating poorly with him or her and becoming hesitant in how they do their jobs. This leads to performance problems and a vicious cycle in which the boss and the subordinate grow ever more estranged from one another.

Groe thinks it's crucial for subordinates to recognize their own and their boss's interdependence. "You need each other to achieve shared objectives, and it is in your best interest to ensure that your work and the work of your boss are aligned and mutually supportive," he writes. "This alignment is best accomplished by your managing up."

Training Wolves

Using the analogy to wolves—social creatures renowned for their abilities to work together as a single unit—Groe goes on to offer practical advice for managing bosses more effectively: things such as getting to know your boss better, seeing the world from his or her perspective, gaining a better understanding of your boss's goals, regularly reporting on progress toward those goals, making sure disagreements are private and polite, and, if needed, initiating meetings with your boss.

How subordinates should manage their boss will depend, of course, on what kind of boss they have and on their own personalities. Some people, for example, tend to resent all types of authority figures, however excellent their managerial skills.

Of course, there are some toxic bosses out there who are virtually unmanageable. In most cases, though, subordinates can find a way to collaborate more effectively with their bosses by gaining a greater insight into their own and their boss's characters and by arriving at common-sense accommodations. For social animals like human beings, such "pack wisdom" may help to ensure the survival of organizations as well as individual careers.

Mark Vickers is editor and senior research analyst for HR Institute (www.hrinstitute.info). Copyright 2005, HRI.

Lessons Learned from Project Management

In his book *The Project Management Tool Kit*, author Tom Kendrick suggests how to use current and past projects to improve the processes used for future work. The advice he offers can be used when planning project execution or at project closure. Used as directed, it can lead to continued use of good practices and recognition of processes needing attention.

Discussion should take place not as a part of a project review or during administrative closure. Rather, a meeting should be held soon after completion of a phase of the project or the entire effort to discuss what went well and desirable changes. The meeting agenda should list practices other project teams should apply to their efforts, processes that need improvement or replacement, and what steps specifically need to be taken and their order.

Before the meeting, project members might be surveyed about their perspective on the effort. You will also want to collect all project reports that are available. Meeting attendees should have access to the actual and planned schedule, actual and planned resources, project issues and problem escalations and project outcome.

Document the meeting and list key recommendations. Implement any changes where you have the authority, writes Kendrick, and develop a business case and propose more significant changes to your management. Following every lessons-learned analysis, select a project aspect to change that will deal with at least one identified problem.

Finally, monitor changes made to ensure expected results and no unintended adverse consequences.

For more information about *The Project Management Tool Kit,* and other AMA book titles, visit www.amanet.org/books. For more help with the projects in your organization, check out AMA's project management seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars

Here's what you'll find on the AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Best Practices: Become a More Competent Speaker. These tactics from AMA's new seminar, "Advanced Leadership Communication Strategies," will help you get your message across while gaining your audience's attention and respect.

Plus, take a Self-Assessment, What Is Your Credibility Quotient? from the new seminar to see how you rate on trust issues at work.

MANAGEMENT

How to Accelerate the Quality of Every Meeting. Imagine how productive your next meeting could be if every participant accepted 100% responsibility for the results. It could happen!

Catch 'em Doing Something Right. If you're faced with a dysfunctional team, you'll be amazed at how powerful a little praise can be.

LEADERSHIP

Where Have Our Heroes Gone? Despite the spate of recent headlines about corporate misdeeds, true heroes abound in the business world. Sander and Jonathon Flaum explain why it's time we recognized them.

HR/TRAINING

Dealing with the "Returning-from-Vacation Blues." If employees dread the thought of returning to work after vacation, it may be because they've lost sight of why their work is meaningful.

Book of the Month:
I've Seen a Lot of Famous People Naked, and They've Got Nothing on You! Business Secrets from the Ultimate Street-Smart Entrepreneur, by Jake Steinfeld. (AMACOM, 2006). Fitness entrepreneur Jake Steinfeld has helped millions of people pump up their health, their bodies and their confidence. He also built his own global fitness brand from the ground up. Now this American success story shares his experience and insight with the rest of us.

For more information (including a sample chapter from the book) and to learn about AMACOM's other business titles, go to www.amanet.org/books
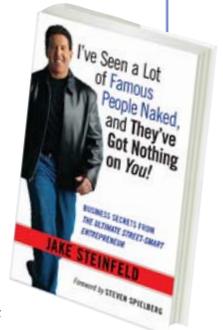
AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

OCTOBER 20-21, LAS VEGAS • Sales Leadership 2005—A timely executive-to-executive exchange of ideas on how to use leadership to inspire your sales force to peak performance levels. Caesars Palace. AMA Members $1,695, Nonmembers $1,895.

OCT. 31-NOV. 4, NAPLES, FLORIDA • AMA's Course for Presidents and CEOs—A unique learning experience to reflect…regain focus…and hone the leadership skills needed to move business forward. AMA Members $4,500, Nonmembers $5,000.

NOVEMBER 3, WEBINAR • Are You Ready for the New PMP® Exam?—For those prepping for the Project Management Professional exam, this webinar featuring Dennis Bolles, AMA seminar leader and author, explains the differences in the new exam; changes to PMBOK,® and steps to understand and prepare for the new exam. FREE

NOVEMBER 7, WEBINAR • AMA/HRI Leadership Development Survey Results—The July 2005 results of an AMA/Human Resource Institute Global Leadership Development survey addressing the drivers of change that impact leadership challenges; elements of organizational culture and processes necessary for effective leadership development; and leadership competencies for the next 10 years. FREE

NOVEMBER 10, AUDIO CONFERENCE • Winners Never Cheat—Jon Huntsman, founder of the world's largest privately held chemical company, speaks candidly about his new book that outlines how to build an organization on standards of which you can be proud; how to develop teams with moral conviction; and respecting customers, partners, employees and even competitors. Members and customers: $169 per site.

NOVEMBER 17, WASHINGTON, DC • Breakfast: Optimizing Your Integrated Marketing Campaigns—Increase your marketing effectiveness and sales productivity through effective process design, campaign integration and measurement strategies. AMA Members $25, Nonmembers $50.

For details and to register for any AMA event, go to www.amanet.org or call 1-800-262-9699.

110382