

Project Management Basics for Busy Geeks

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Who Am I?

- Meri Williams
- South African, moved to the UK in 2001
- Work at Procter & Gamble as an Information & Decision Solutions manager (since 2002)
- Blog at:
 - <http://blog.merwilliams.com>
 - <http://blog.geekmanager.co.uk>



What I'll Cover Today

1. Project Management is not The Enemy
2. Basic Project Lifecycle
3. The “Big Secret” of PM
4. Tools to Help You Manage Your Projects Better

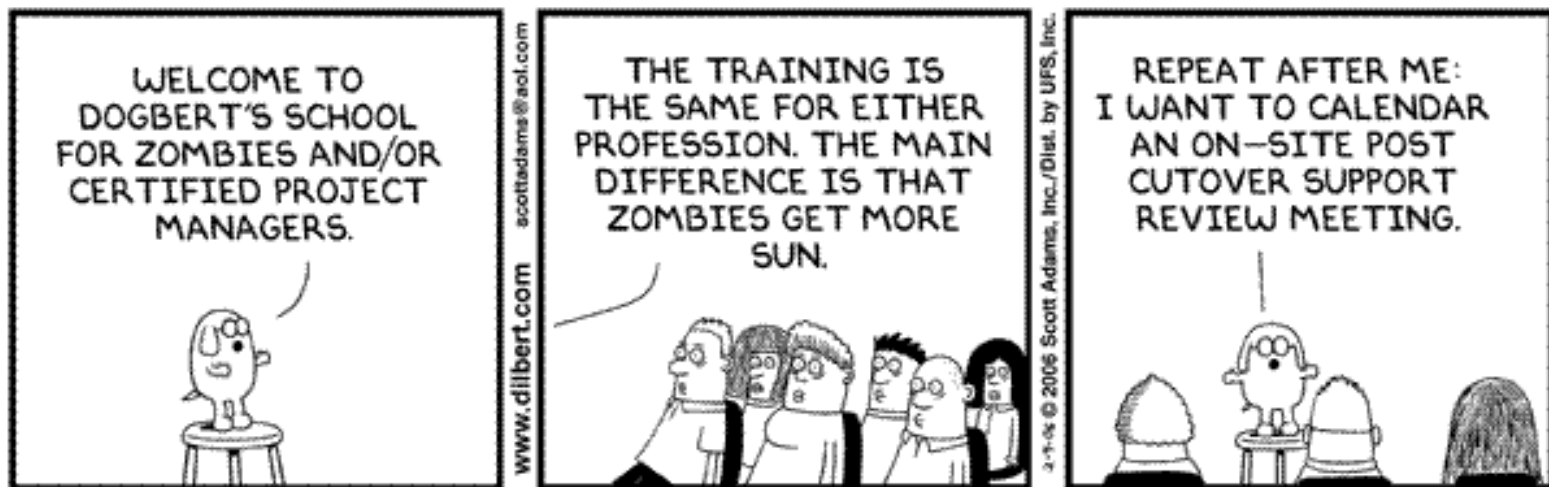


Project Management Is Not The Enemy

(probably)

Is PM The Enemy?

Won't Project Management turn you into a mindless zombie?



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The Problem With PM...

- Project Management is perceived as
 - Boring
 - Just overhead/extra work
 - Useless/adding no value
 - Distraction from “real work”
 - Fluffy ... or stuffy
 - BORING!



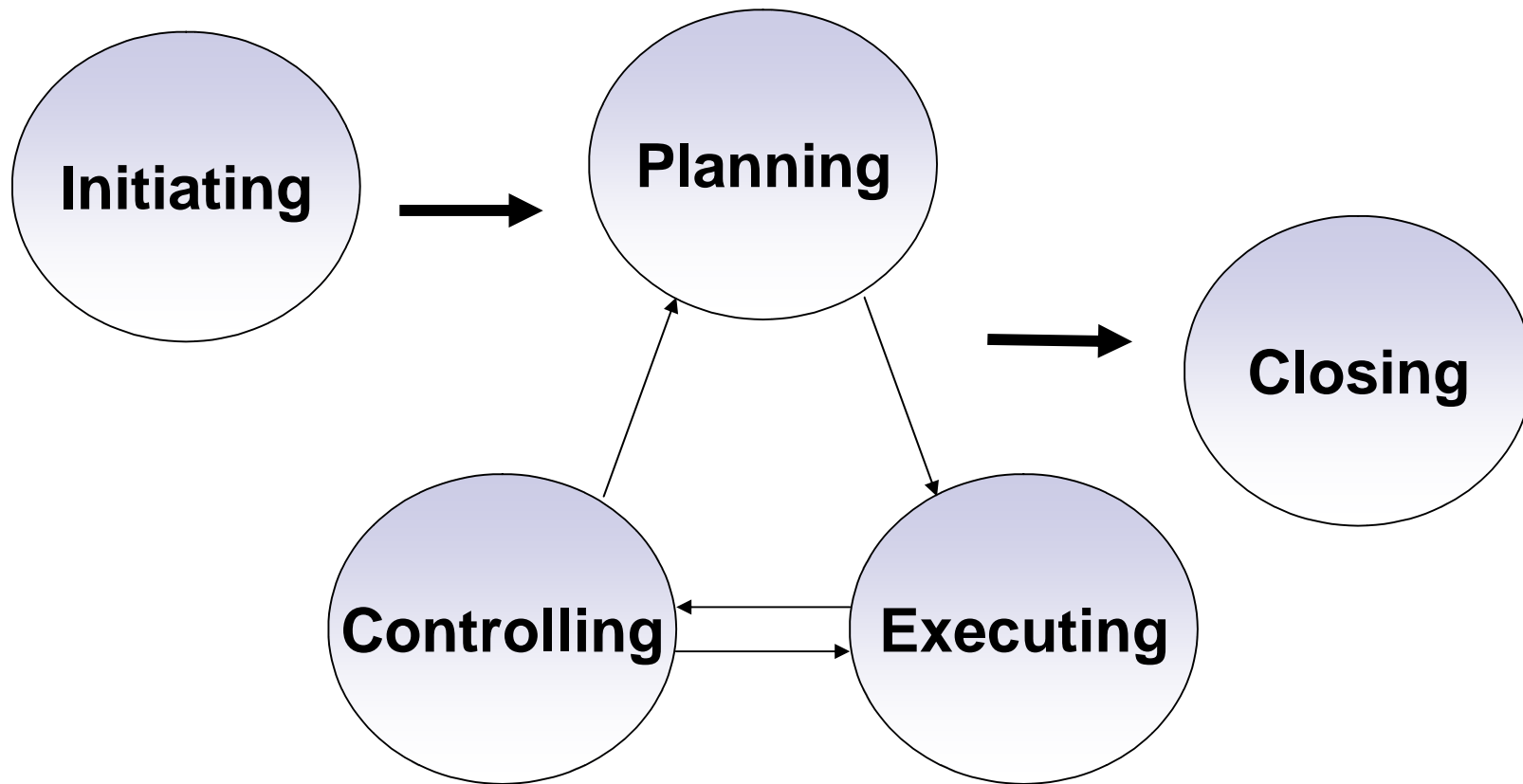
The Reality Is...

- TOO MUCH Project Management can be all those things
- It's all about balancing the “science” of Project Management (what you “should” do) with the “art” of PM (what you actually NEED to do)
- Pick, choose & use only what's right for you and your project/team



Basic Project Management Lifecycle

Basic PM Lifecycle (PMI)





Associated Outputs

- **Initiating** – Project Feasibility, Project Initiation/Kick-off Document
- **Planning** – Gantt Charts, WBS, Schedules, Task Lists, Resource Levelling Charts
- **Executing/Controlling** – Task Lists, Issue Lists, Bug Lists, Deliverables
- **Closing** – Close-out Documents, Customer Satisfaction Assessments, Payment (!)



The “Big Secret” of PM

Especially true for smaller
projects... or just smaller
teams



What's the “Big Secret” ?


- Most people think that the value of Project Management is in the Executing & Controlling phases (cf construction)
- This is what geeks object to most – we have our own ways of being productive and getting things done
- Often managers don't understand the work, which exacerbates the problem



What's the “Big Secret” ?


For most smaller projects, the real value of Project Management is in **Initiating, Planning & Closing**

These areas are where projects go from success → failure/ dissatisfaction



Why Are These The Most Important Areas?

- **Initiating** is where you formulate your “contract” with the client/customer /users/management
- Lack of agreement about what’s important is the biggest cause for disagreement and scope creep
- Lack of understanding of the impact of changes is the biggest reason for escalating costs (in cost, time and quality terms)




Why Are These The Most Important Areas?

- The point of **Planning** is NOT to follow the plan, but to gain a better understanding of what needs to be done.

*“In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable”
– Eisenhower*

- The other purpose of a plan is for communication – your stakeholders care about whether you are on-track/late/etc



Why Are These The Most Important Areas?

- **Closing** is important because go-live is not the end of your project
- Your project is finished when you have sign-off (agreement) from stakeholders that it is finished
- If you treat launch as the end of the project, then you will get “undead” stakeholders – coming back from the past all the time with new requirements/fixes



Tools to Help You Manage Your Projects



Tools I'll Cover Today

- NOT going to focus on issue lists and bug lists and things like that → most of us have the development cycle (Execute & Control) sorted
- Going to focus on tools that will help in those all-important areas → Initiating, Planning & Closing



Initiation – Project Objective

- The most powerful tool for initiation is a very simple statement of the objective of the project:

To

Strategy

WHAT – you are going to do

In a way that

Tactics

HOW – you are going to do it,
including parameters

So that

Objective/Goal

WHY - Measurable business
benefit.



Initiation – Project Objective

■ Why use it?

- Focuses your mind
- Gives a platform for upfront disagreements about the point of the project
- Lets you have the discussion BEFORE anything has been built
- Gets agreement from stakeholders
- Won't stop scope creep, but gives you a GREAT way to explain cost/push back



Planning

- Quite often, when planning, you DON'T need a detailed task list in a full-on Gantt chart
- You can trust people in your team to work out how to deliver their parts
- All you need to do a plan and schedule for is to
 - Call out external/internal dependencies
 - Track progress



Planning – Tracking Progress

- “Percent complete” is the most dangerous measure in planning
- Why?
 - People lie
 - People don't know/are over-optimistic
 - Work expands to fill the available time

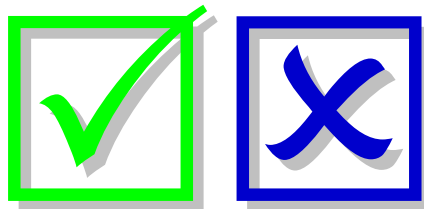


Planning – Tracking Progress

- The solution is not to plan tasks and not to measure progress in % complete.
- Instead, **only plan milestones** – just plan them small enough that it gives you visibility of progress
- Binary completion (is it done? Y or N) is MUCH more successful as a measure of progress (60/100 milestones reached)

Controlling/Executing

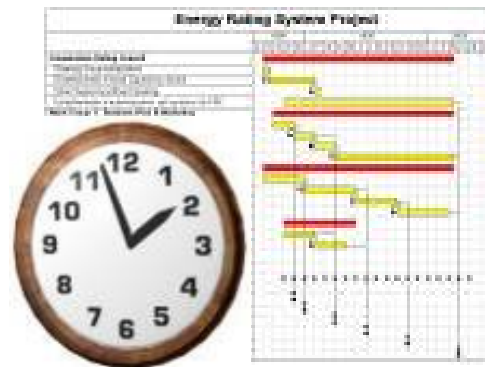
Scope



Quality



Time



Resource





Controlling/Executing – Scope Management

- You can't stop the stakeholders changing their minds, or requirements changing
- You CAN make them aware of the impact
- Let the customer prioritise – show them the cost of making the scope change
- Go back to the project initiation document – does the change help towards objective?



Closing – Closure Document

- If you did your job well when you initiated the project, then closing is a doddle
- Customer/client/management knows the exact scope of the project
- During the project you have managed scope using the balance quadrant
- Closing is just a matter of acknowledging that everything agreed has been delivered -- **WRITE IT DOWN!** (incl future support agreement, etc)



Closing – Closure Document

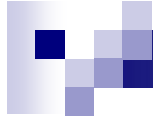
- What if they still want more?
- Your initiation document, scope tracking through the project and the final deliverables SHOULD give you the position to argue that they really want a new project ... with a new price
- Remember that even internally, things have a cost – even if only resourcing / other things not getting delivered as fast



In Summary:

- Key Tools Include:

- Project Objective
- Plans Full of Mini Milestones
- Balance Quadrant (Scope, Quality, Cost & Time)
- Scope Management Process
- Closure Document



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Any Questions?

- Thank you for listening & participating 😊
- This was a very quick “flavour” of Project Management – there’s a lot more out there!
- Places to start reading:
 - <http://www.randsinrepose.com>
 - <http://slackermanager.com/>
 - <http://blog.geekmanager.co.uk>