How to Optimize a Project Plan in One Day  (A Leadership Perspective)

“Learning how to obtain calculated answers based on what’s essential to increasing the reliability of a successful outcome.”

Catalyst Technologies
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Let your workforce communicate:

No project plan is optimized unless the people doing the implementation are saying it is ... so how does that happen in one day?

What is communicated between a supervisor and his team can be categorized into three significant steps (1) what, (2) how and (3) ready. This approach describes a communication protocol and if you want to know if the plan is optimized, you need to get people to say they are ready to meet the requirements provided. If you ask people if they're ready, they'll tell you “yes” to ensure they have a job the next day. And even if they were open to tell you exactly the chances of getting the job done on time, it would be more of a “finger pointing” session than an optimization process.

So, this article is going to describe a quick way to allow your workforce to give you an honest answer. After we describe the basic process, we’ll discuss ways to use the readiness information to optimize the plan. Let’s face it, not everyone will be able to handle all their tasks, especially if it involves activities that haven't been done before. To assume that they'll figure it out on their own, while staying on-time and within budget, just because you hired smart people, would be a colossal mistake.

While supporting an IT international firm in Mexico City, we asked that their best implementer take some time to use the process we are about to show you to grade readiness. The supervisor explained that his best person only had 10 minutes. We used their existing project plan that had assigned him tasks spreading over six South American countries. He was finished grading his 60 tasks in 5 minutes. When his supervisor was asked if he was ready to handle all his assigned tasks, the project manager said, “He’s my best, of course he’s ready.” He wasn’t ready for all his tasks. Yet, if his best tech wasn’t ready, who else on his implementation team wasn’t ready and when was he going to find out?

Hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil – that really doesn’t work!

Sorry, in the project management world, what you don’t know can hurt you.

YOUR WORKFORCE FIRST NEEDS TO BELIEVE

There are two forms of workforce readiness: (1) Believing and (2) Knowing. We’ll only have time to discuss “believing.” Believing takes longer than knowing. This is what your workforce needs to believe:

- They can do their assigned jobs well.
- They can continue to do their jobs well when the unexpected happens – and the unexpected always seems to happen.
CAPABILITY “TEN” SCALE
Divide the scale in two halves. The top half, from 6 to 10, means that the assigned task has been successfully completed at least 1 time before (6 means completing it was very difficult and 10 means it was very easy). The bottom half, from 1 to 5, means this is the 1st time doing the task (5 means having all the skills necessary to do the task and 1 means none of the skills needed).

MOTIVATION “TEN” SCALE
Divide the scale in two halves. The top half, from 6 to 10, means that the person assigned the task is positively motivated to successfully complete the task (6 means slightly positively motivated and 10 means very positively motivated). The bottom half, from 1 to 5, means that the person assigned the task negatively motivated to successfully complete the task (5 means slightly negatively motivated and 1 means very negatively motivated).

ANALYZING CRITICAL TASKS
Critical tasks are the tasks on the critical path compared with the lowest combined motivation and capability scores. In case of a tie, pick the critical task with the earliest start date.

CAPABILITY AND MOTIVATION MEASUREMENTS
Let’s first understand the three degrees of project risk. You may have heard of other risk types, yet it all comes down to people being able to do their jobs well. The 1st degree of risk occurs if the workforce lacks the previous experience to do their jobs well. If experience is lacking, another degree of risk may occur if your workforce doesn’t have the necessary basic skills. Finally, the 3rd degree of risk type involves motivation. Let’s be clear, based on using this technique for over 20 years, the primary reason why members in your workforce would not be motivated most always comes down to a single concern: a belief that they can’t do their jobs well. Your people take pride in their work.

Initially, the best way to take measurements is to do it anonymously. Set up a method based on the 1 to 10 scale approach described in this article. Collect the results and you’re half way to an optimal project management plan.

OPTIMIZING A PROJECT PLAN
Once you’ve collected your measurements, you can begin to look at the most critical tasks and improve them, focusing on raising the experience, skills and motivation of the workforce using one or more of the five techniques listed below:

- Increase your confidence or knowledge with some type of educational program (a) Informal training, (b) Formal training, or (c) Completing a similar task
- Modify the resources (e.g., internal resources, external resources, time, and labor-hours) or working environment defined for use with this task.
- Modify the way you are accomplishing the task by using a different approach.
- Modify the support group or other team members to assist you in doing this task.
- Increase incentives to overcome task challenges and issues.
THERE’S MORE TO THE STORY

If you follow the approach provided, you should be able to collect capability and motivation measurements for a project plan with about 3000 task within a couple of hours. We’ve been able to do it in about an hour, but we used some software automation to gather the data and do all the number crunching. Raising these capability and motivation numbers may take a little longer. As discussed, improve the critical tasks that are starting immediately. Then keep optimizing along the way.

Every week, spend an hour or two, optimizing the next set of tasks and stay ahead of the schedule. Be ready to handle the unexpected, which means that an original score dropped because some greater constraint was added. Those tasks in crisis take first priority. It is important to keep in mind that when you fall behind in budget or schedule because of the unexpected, it is the capability and motivation of the people assigned to those tasks that needs to be addressed, stabilizing your budget or schedule.

The focus on workforce capability and motivation will always result in improved performance. That’s how it has happened and will continue to happen. Take advantage of this fact.

We’ve automated this optimization process to make it easy, fast and powerful.

We add templates and plug-ins to your existing MS Office programs.

If interested, give us a call.

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For more information or to receive a detailed handbook describing the approach used, please contact our project support team at:

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