

FOSTERING STUDENT INTEREST IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT BY USE OF PERSONAL GOAL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

Project management is an important topic that is taught in various disciplines such as engineering and construction [2], new product development [1], and software development [3]. Students' understanding of the material is often limited to the image of the Gantt chart and some basic concepts that do not transcend to the "real" world upon graduation and is the concern that provides the motivation for this exercise. Specifically, this exercise is intended to illustrate the practice of project management through the use of an issue with broader appeal to the student than the text book focus on construction or information technology project management.

BACKGROUND

Generating interest in any course can be challenging and especially so in a required course that most students perceive as offering little potential of use in their future. What is required is a means of generating student interest in that course or a demonstrated application that is presented in such a manner that the student recognizes usefulness in the topic or a potential solution to a problem they are aware of. This idea has been referred to as a "hook" in past teaching workshops as a way of promoting interest in the topic itself.

Project management (PM) in the business curriculum is often seen as a methodology or tool set of skills more appropriate for the engineering field and more recently that of software design and coding. Not only do management majors express doubt in future application of the concepts presented in the course, but marketing majors have enrolled in the course and dropped the course as having no application to their field. Attempts to explain that new product development and advertising campaigns were marketing applications failed to sway the students. Asking the preverbal "average" student to accept on faith the usefulness of learning has produced poor results since its first attempt. Where the non-traditional or the exceptional student is more inclined to learn for the knowledge gained through that learning, hooking the average student is more elusive. Most college students are aware of the concepts of personal goals. The use of and advantages of applying personal goals are promoted by acclaimed athletes, industry leaders, and the self made millionaires. What is often missing from the lectures, mass media print of such as Tim Robbins, or Peter Drucker is the how of converting that goal into the required steps of going from the now to the desired. Prior studies by the private sector and government have documented that most seniors will retire and rely solely on social security for retirement support. The need for retirement planning is well documented, but also well documented is the fact that the majority of people do not know how to identify the individual tasks required to transition from that vague concept of a goal to the specific individual tasks and how to monitor the progress.

Proposal

Prior efforts to generate interest in project management concepts through the use of familiar endeavors such as building a house, planning a wedding, or landscaping the yard have had limited success. Students often profess lack of content knowledge or that the topic is not related to their major. Students repeatedly score the project management course as one of limited usefulness in their future or not very relevant to their major. If students can not be motivated to acquire the basic skill concepts of project management for their professional lives, would an active learning application in an area of interest to the individual student generate more critical mass? Students appear to have difficulty grasping the concepts of project management in the beginning of the course and lose interest in the subject matter before the practical application portion of the class begins. This proposal is one to address this issue by introducing a practical portion before the theory presentation and to utilize the familiar topic area of goal planning. This follows the practice of using the familiar to introduce the complex or unfamiliar. As most people have trouble in just identifying goals instead of wishes, an exercise in decomposing the goals into actionable task this exercise will introduce students to a practical application of project management and assist them in later efforts of goal setting and attainment. Decomposing the tasks required to achieve their goal is similar to breaking the project down into the work breakdown structure.

Using the project management format offers advantages in goal identification. It offers a tested structured method of identifying all of the required activities, it includes a time component, and all required resources to complete the project. Most people state a goal but do not identify the required steps to transition from their current position to that of the goal. Further more, most people fail to identify any additional skills or attributes of self improvement their deficient in. The PM structured method requires that these issues are addressed.

Achieving some goals may require only one or two actions. Others may require several intermediate mini-goals before the primary goal is realized. As an example, you are a production manager and would like to move up to the manufacturing manager level. A review of those in manufacturing manager positions would reveille what qualifications are common among that group. Which qualifications are you deficient in? What action is required to address that deficiency? Is it a one step action or are several steps required to address that single deficiency? How long will this additive process require? What resources will be required to assist your effort? What obstacles are you likely to encounter and what resources would assist you past these obstacles? Once these actions are identified, most PM software programs will generate a time scale for each step of the process. Updates and revisions can easily be performed. Because of the time scale presentation of the goal's individual activities, monitoring can be easily performed. An added advantage of utilizing PM software is that most people are visually oriented and the visual presentation of the individual activities makes the monitoring and revision sequence much easier to understand.

Anticipated Results

After the students identify and develop their individual goal requirement, it is anticipated that the students will be able to understand the theory and text material presented in the course. Further, it is expected that the students will be equipped to utilize PM concepts in their business careers as well as personal development. This should be reflected by an increase in student evaluation scores for the project management course.

REFERENCES

- [1] Barkley, B.T. *Project Management in New Product Development*. McGraw-Hill, 2007
- [2] Pinto, J. K. *Project Management: Achieving Competitive Advantage*. Prentice-Hall, NJ, 2006
- [3] Schwalbe, K *Information Technology Project Management, 4th*. Thompson, 2006