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INSIGHTS



PROJECT MANAGEMENT: LESSONS LEARNED

– Kent Lamb, Partner

Maybe you can teach an old dog some new tricks!

I was recently given the opportunity to expand my project management experience in a way that I wasn't expecting. It was to manage a project in an area of SAP for which I had no direct functional experience. Given that I have always taken the approach of looking for roles where I had the greatest chance of success, I was a little concerned that I may be at a disadvantage, but decided it was worth the risk. As expected, it has not only been a challenge at times, but also a great learning experience and quite rewarding as well. I wanted to pass along a few of the lessons I learned.

I don't pretend to be the first to learn these lessons. In fact, with just a little research, I quickly found plenty of quotes that echoed my experience. Below, I've included a few that felt especially relevant.

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people."

- Mahatma Gandhi

I'm not sure a project manager can be successful for long without building broad-based support. A project manager needs to be able to deal with stakeholders from various disciplines, departments, and perspectives. Also understanding the simple, yet sometimes fleeting, question of "what's in it for me?" cannot be underestimated. ***Motives can be powerful, and at a minimum, understanding them is critical to success.***

I've yet to find anything that replaces experience. For an SAP project manager, this includes both project and

business experience, along with other valuable skills such as stakeholder management, change leadership, and a solid understanding of the technical landscape. It was purely by chance that I was first exposed to SAP, and that chance encounter turned into a long-term career. Over the years, I've been fortunate to hold roles that have allowed me to view projects from the perspective of most stakeholders.

"There is no such thing as natural touch. Touch is something you create by hitting millions of golf balls."

- Lee Trevino

Just as the best golfers learn from their bad shots and poor course management, I've tried to learn from not only my own mistakes, but also from mistakes made by others. Given the number of projects I've been exposed to, and from different perspectives and levels of responsibility, my learning opportunities have been quite significant. The often-used phrase of "no pain, no gain" certainly comes to mind as well.



The power of experience:

Although it's clear that there are common aspects to all projects, I've never seen two projects that were the same. Knowing this going in, ***it is important to leverage all of the experience one has in order to be able to quickly assess the landscape and get to work.*** With experience comes the understanding that feeling caught up doesn't guarantee nothing has been missed, especially amid constant

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change. This insight drives seasoned project managers to stay vigilant. There's just too much "building" to be done to rest. The project manager must build the project task list, timeline, and resource plan, maintain relationships with stakeholders, create status reports and steering committee slides, continually adjust and tweak the project task list, schedule, and resource plan, etc. The role of a project manager cannot be understated in its importance.

A project manager must focus on what needs to be done, and then do it. This may seem obvious, but sometimes what needs to be done is not necessarily what one would prefer to do, or is easy to do. Projects are rarely over-staffed with plenty of time to take it easy along the way. This may require the project manager to push, push, and push some more to keep the project on track. I will even go so far as to say that if a few feathers aren't ruffled now and then, the project manager probably isn't pushing hard enough.

"My job is not to be easy on people. My job is to make them better."
- Steve Jobs

Additionally, the perspectives and motives of different stakeholders can sometimes be at odds with one another. In this situation, doing what is best for the project can therefore also be at odds with one or more stakeholders. One must navigate carefully here, but it's also important to keep in mind that when the project is over and the measurement of project success has been completed, the project manager will be held accountable. Doing the right things for the project will build a more stable foundation, and a more defensible position, rather than one that is built trying to keep everyone happy.



One thing that has always bothered me is when someone is quick to point out problems, but rarely, if ever, offers a possible solution. It seems to me that finding a problem or pointing out an issue is the easy part and doesn't typically take a great amount of thought. ***I want to be part of a team that's solution-focused, because that's where the real value lies.*** As noted above, we need to learn from our mistakes, but I haven't been able to move forward as quickly if I continue to dwell on them. By putting the focus on solutions, the team will be both more positive and, as a result, more productive. And what project manager doesn't want a more productive project team?

Wrapping up:

Before I close, I do want to go back to my first point and emphasize that building support via relationships is the foundation for all that is accomplished. Phone calls and emails can be quick and easy, but they don't replace face-to-face conversations. ***Consider time spent here as an investment, and remember that investments don't always pay off right away.***

As I stated at the beginning, I've only listed a few topics which deserve to be discussed, and there's a good chance I could have come up with a more relevant topic or two. Then again, I still have more to learn and more to build, and perhaps a few feathers to ruffle along the way.

Next Steps:

If you're looking to drive real value from your SAP projects (and maybe even ruffle a few feathers along the way!) Titan can help. Contact your Titan Consulting Director or visit titanconsulting.net to see how we can help you move forward, faster.