HOW SENIOR LEADERS CAN ENSURE PROJECT SUCCESS

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2019 Project Management Symposium

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE
A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department

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UMD Project Management Symposium
May 9-10, 2019   Slide 2

Outline of Presentation

- Project Management: Some Observations on the Current State
- What Senior Leaders Bring to the Table
- Our Messages for Senior Leaders
  - Organizing and Planning the Project for Success
  - Managing the Different Cultures and Roles of any Successful Project
  - Managing People: Motivating Good Behavior from Day One
  - How to Engage outside and inside Meetings and Briefings
  - When Problems Arise: How to Handle the Expected and Unexpected
- Feedback from Senior Leaders Workshop – and from You!

Observations on Project Management

- Projects produce much of our nations value and ability to compete.

- We are not doing a good job of Managing Large and Small Projects in the Federal Govt and related sectors.

- The Problem is worse than we think or report.

- The Problem is not one of knowledge skill or experience – we know how to do project management, procurement, IT, finance, system engineering, etc.

- The Problem is not one of Politics or Malfeasance.

- The Problem is not anyone's fault - everyone does the best that they can.

- The Problem is a ***Systems problem*** and will take systematic thinking to fix it

- Senior Leadership is needed to address this problem, and it can be done!

(Most) Senior Leaders Today

- Senior Leaders largely play these three roles during a project:
  - Bystanders, largely letting the Project managers and their teams run the show
  - Parochial focusers, focusing on areas where they have knowledge, experience, or opinions and perhaps taking the side of one group within the Project Management system
  - Deciders and Overseers, waiting until decisions have to be made or projects are in trouble to get involved
- Senior Leaders often feel inhibited by lack of technical or contractual knowledge so allow PM's to become the drivers and the actual "senior leaders"
- In many organizations project managers are incentivized to keep their Senior leaders in the dark, both to gain or keep funding, and to avoid what they fear would be ignorant interference in areas they feel they know best

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What Senior Leaders Can Bring to the Table

- The ability to create vision and drive an organization forward
- Organizational clout and knowledge
- Knowledge of how to influence and demand change
- Personnel and Relationship and Coalition Building skills
- Ability to motivate and keep teams centered on the goals and mission
- Good BS antenna
- The ability to recognize what they don't know and where they have weaknesses and the ability to compensate or mitigate these areas

What Senior Leaders Can Do (More of)

Organizing and Planning the Project for Success

- Come up with and articulate a shared vision for the Project
- Make sure the contracts support the vision and avoid "adverse contracting" that will probably result in overruns and restructuring
- Push for stable and full funding
- Require and Enforce One plan and One set of data that everyone sees
- Set clear lines of authority
- Spend the time and money upfront on planning and putting in a tracking system like EVM so you always know where you are

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What Senior Leaders Can Do (More of)

Managing the Different Cultures and Roles of any Successful Project

- Joint accountability, shared responsibility, awards and consequences for failure
  - Benjamin Franklin "we will all hang separately or we will all hang together"
- Common mission and goals first and last
- Push for cooperation and recognize that some risks are greater than others so focus on the risks where the danger is greatest
- Hold Meetings where everyone is present and transparency is key
- Goal is always "finding and fixing problems, not fixing the blame"

What Senior Leaders Can Do (More of)

Managing People: Motivating Good Behavior from Day One

- Ensure that the project manager and chief engineer on the organization's side and contractor's side are experienced and qualified with "dirt under their fingernails"

- Hire program managers who understand that you expect them to live within their budget and to constantly seek improvements/efficiency

- Hold regular large open meetings

- Allow everyone to see each other's data

- Set clear lines of authority – PM responsible for contract and execution, everyone else is support

- Use testing to build trust

- Hold everyone accountable and reward all who help

What Senior Leaders Can Do (More of)

How to Engage outside and inside Meetings and Briefings

- Be sure each IPT and counterpart contractors speak at each meeting
- Review cost/schedule/quality/performance/suppliers performance/risk and risk mitigation – allow no BS or hand waving
- The faster and the more often you get reports the quicker you can react, fix, and pivot.
- Turn over rocks – make each meeting a voyage of discovery for what might go wrong and what might get changed or fixed
- Watch the critical path and do not let progress in other areas distort the rate of progress

What Senior Leaders Can Do (More of)

When Problems Arise: How to Handle the Expected and Unexpected

- Expect a big problem midstream and be prepared
- Always know where you are
  - Track management reserve and look for where the project can spare management reserve
  - Install an early warning system like EVM
  - Do not hire nor expect PMs to be superheros but people who can be trusted to follow a process and be transparent
  - Be sure that no one panics and no one will if you do not
  - Invoke joint accountability by stating it is everyone's problem

Senior Leaders Respond

- Responses of Senior Leaders at workshop last year were mostly to raise concerns about how hard it was to do effective PM

- Still hard to see their role as overall system managers

- Nonetheless, each offered some concrete suggestions and case studies – see handout.

- More work needs to be done to raise awareness of the positive role senior leaders can and must play

Your Turn to Respond!

- Please share your thoughts now and/or send them to me at:

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They will be incorporated into an article I am writing.

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Thank You!

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