The Project Development Experience

Ryan Somma

Strayer University

On the one hand, it is difficult to think of this as the half-way point in the Blue Group's project; however, what I may perceive as a slow start to project is, in fact, just what is expected in what was mostly a formational period. Although the project sponsor defined the project so broadly and vaguely as to generate some disconcertion among team members, feedback on the project has been good to the extent that the project sponsor's time can provide. Team-building activities, introductions and coordinating on tasks have also taken time, but only as is expected. Finally, the nature of the medium, the online collaboration tools provided in the Blackboard Suite, both enables group progress by allowing for asynchronous collaboration across multiple time zones and personal schedules and is lacking in some respects in tools for collaboration on the actual document in production.

Bradbary and Garrett identify securing the support of the project sponsor as a crucial component of running a successful project (Bradbary & Garrett, 2005). Our project sponsor, Dr. Manning, has been fairly, seemingly purposefully, cryptic in explaining the project details, as when he responded on the "Ask the Professor" discussion board to a request for additional details by a student with, "The Group will decide upon one project. There will be one document developed by the group. Everyone in the group will submit the same document (Manning, 2009)." While there is no budget for him to divert funds to other projects, and the project requirements are so flexibly defined that we don't have to worry that he might "telepathically send his ideas" and then "berate us for not asking input (Bradbary & Garrett, 2005)," Dr. Manning does fit the profile of a project sponsor who has numerous other pressing responsibilities on his plate, which prohibits him from providing the ideal level of support for the project. On the plus

side, Dr. Manning does not take a pessimistic view of our project, and has stopped in our discussion board to praise our group's progress, regularly sets project milestones to check on our status, and has provided important feedback on the details of our project progress; therefore, while his many responsibilities legitimately prevent him from becoming too involved in directly supporting our project, Dr. Manning does genuinely support the success of the project and believes in our capabilities to accomplish it.

I volunteered to research the Human Resource Management aspect of the project plan, which presents some unique challenges on a project of this type, where project scope is nebulous and resources are difficult to define. Understanding the skill sets and work styles of the individuals in the Blue Group will go a long way towards understanding how to leverage each member's unique style and talents. The Myers and Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) holds the most appeal for developing the project team as a team building exercise to determine the personality preferences of everyone on the Blue Group (Schwalbe, 2007). Although the DISC Profiling system, based on the work of William Marston Ph.D in 1928, is equally, if not more, prestigious (Schwalbe, 2007), the only online sources for taking the Disc Profiling test charged between $20 and $70 for each test (DISC, 2009), multiplied by four team members, and the test becomes cost-prohibitive for our relatively under funded project, while the MBTI is available online for free at HumanMetrics.com (Human Metrics, 2008). While it is my hope to have each member of the group take the MBTI test, accomplishing this will require overcoming the demands currently placed on everyone's time.

Such external demands are easily the biggest complication when it comes to coordinating with individuals in different time zones and personal schedules. Luckily, the

suite of tools provided in the Blackboard system enables asynchronous meetings and collaboration, which has be indispensable to project progress. While the online format does prevent the team for reading one another's body language and facial expressions, as *Herding Chickens* recommends (Bradbary & Garrett, 2005), I personally find that I thrive in the world of written communication, where I may finely articulate my contributions to discussions and take the time to ensure accuracy in my statement. The file-sharing tool in the Blackboard Suite would be it's one failing, as it is extremely basic. A more comprehensive file-sharing tool would provide the capability for Version Management (VM), so that multiple team members could work on the same document at once, merging their modifications upon commit, as the TortoiseSVN VM software allows (Collins-Sussman *et.al,* 2008), or, at a more basic level, allow members to check out files so that others may not modify them as they are being worked on. An alternative means to achieve this capability of multiple members working on a single document with a complete history of changes would be to set up a Wiki. A survey of 168 Corporate Wiki Users reported that 63 percent of them benefited from "increased collaboration efficiency" and 71 percent of users reported easier dissemination of work (Majchrzak, *et al.*, 2006). It is possible that a Wiki could provide a comprehensive solution conducive to team collaboration on the project.

While the Blackboard Suite of online collaboration tools does lack VM software for collaborating directly on the same electronic document and project file, and is lacking many of the features cutting edge developments like Wikis include, without it, progress on this project would be impossible. Although collaboration is not face-to-face and is asynchronous, team-building efforts such as MBTI analysis and continuing coordination

on project tasks are crucial to completing the project on time, as is continual support from our project sponsor in requesting deliverables and providing feedback on those deliverables. No matter the outcome, no effort on this project will be wasted, as there are lessons learned in every step.

References

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