

## Excellence in Project Management

By: Michael C. Aquilino <http://www.innovationservices.com>

What is it that truly distinguishes excellence in project management? How do project managers who consistently produce good results rise above base level proficiency to serve as “champions” for the projects they lead? What insights or “tools” are essential to create being a project management “champion” in a way that fosters sustainability and continued growth for a team or organization?

Project management in many professions is a career aspiration and viewed as a gateway to senior level executive opportunity. Project management has long been vital to driving business results. The principles of project management are incorporated in academic curriculum, numerous books and resource publications are available, and a professional organization, the Project Management Institute, has done much to advance the discipline. Many organizations and individuals invest heavily in training to augment their proficiency with certifications, degrees, and formalized project management mentoring programs. In some organizations, professionals step into the role of project management much like being “thrown into the deep end.” While necessity can be a great motivator, training generally results in a grateful and more confident employee, increased profitability, happier stakeholders, and a more sustainable enterprise. There are, nevertheless, many degreed, certified, mentored, and seasoned project managers who do not produce consistent results. Which begs the question of why? What dynamics are present that may cause that? Some are “burnt-out” while others share a sense of being “overwhelmed.” These same project managers often then source conflict or concern among project team members and the organizations they represent. Sometimes knowingly and often times not so knowingly. It leaves one to ask “is it possible that something may be missing in current training, mentoring, or certification programs that could mitigate the risk and costs of this? What can be done to achieve or regain the “excellence” part of project management?” The answers to these questions are particularly relevant when considering that the growth and the profitability of an organization are at stake. Readily available resources rarely ever provide guidance for the “well being” of a project manager who seemingly has lost their way or to reverse the potentially destructive ripple effect, or costs, often imparted on an organization’s internal and external stakeholders.

Excellence in project management is not simply achieved through mastering sound work breakdown structure, project set up, or the inextricably integral relationship of scope-budget–schedule. Important as they are (as well as the other tools within the project management discipline) some necessary keys for excellence in project management are elusively outside of conventional project management training, theory or study.

The role of thinking as it relates to excellence is a critical component to consider. Unless the thinking being applied is clearly distinguished and new tools are incorporated by project managers, consistent levels of excellence will remain problematic.

Two drivers of excellence in project management are those of intention and accountability. They are also vital tenets of powerful leadership in any role. Distinguishing intention and accountability, and teaching these key tenets, is typically not found in conventional project management curriculum, credentialing, or training. When intention and accountability are brought to a higher level of awareness and ownership it causes the action of

embracing the continuous learning process. True “excellence” requires project managers to take on their relationship to themselves and a willingness to be open to looking at the automatic way they may get while being with others, within a conflict, change, or any of the very real circumstances present in the world of work. The operative word is “excellence.” Herein is the first reality-check, or what appears to be very real to project managers. Many project managers are so absorbed and so busy, for example, multi-tasking across multiple assignments, within the details of administrative requirements, reacting to delays or changing requests, etc., that they are not fully present to their own intention let alone the intention of those they lead. True accountability does not include defensive rationalizations, justifications, or rigid thinking.

As we know intention is no longer a secret and has been written about extensively in many well known publications such as the best selling book by Jim Collins “Good to Great” (Collins focuses on a ‘strong will’) or Dr. Wayne Dyers’ much fuller body of work on “The Power of Intention.” Often though, reading about intention alone may produce little change in individuals or organizations, it requires going a bit deeper and requires action. Putting intention to work may call for a shift in thinking along with a new set of actions that could be outside of who or how a project manager has known themselves to be. Before any intention even has a chance of taking hold, project managers may need to confront, at a deep level within themselves, the natural resistance that is part of human nature to being authentic. When intention is present things take on an automatic nature or energy. The focus is on the mission or the project and there is no more “trying” and the internal language (i.e., self-talk) and expressions with others shift to intentional dialogue and actions. “Shall” replaces “try to”; struggling and effort are replaced by momentum, energy and extraordinary results. Interestingly enough intention is a choice, or a way of being about things. It is not an item to simply be crossed off the checklist.

The “excellence” of project management truly takes hold through accountability and a commitment to a continuous learning process. Being accountable for results produced (and not produced) as well as holding others to account advances a project manager’s performance. Accountability may be initially perceived to feel uncomfortable for many project managers. The reality is being truly accountable and intentional for all aspects of a project, including how one relates, interacts or reacts can feel great. But not for everyone who is in the project management role.

Excellence in project management is rarely ever achieved as a “theme of the month” undertaking, moreover it is an ongoing way of how a project manager holds things within their own thinking that can strengthen and inspire. Through coaching, perseverance, and standing for the value that can be obtained through intention and accountability, there are sustainable levels of learning, growth, and breakthrough results made possible. Once intention and accountability are distinguished, taught and recognized as vital keys to “excellence”, the next step is equally important. Evoking an authentic commitment to being open to mastering leadership must be achieved. Once at that crossroad it is then that the powerful combination of intention and accountability will begin to demonstrate itself. Project managers will then cause higher and new levels of performance and satisfaction in their ability to lead. In addition they will find a new level of control over projects, an ability to cause a culture of accomplishment, and will add greater value for themselves and those around them with ease. Take time to reflect upon and to consider what would be possible for your organization that is not possible now if across the board everyone involved in the project management process was operating at true level of “excellence.”

For further information on Excellence in Project Management, Leadership Development or Career Transition contact Michael C. Aquilino at [maquilino@innovationservices.com](mailto:maquilino@innovationservices.com)

To learn more about the proven results caused with individuals and organizations throughout the country, please visit us at <http://www.InnovationalServices.com>