

Critical Reflection Paper

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Introduction

The Project Management Institute's *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* contrasts *project* and *operational* work and describes a project as "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service." This course involved using the 5-Phases of Project Management (Weiss and Wysocki, 1992) to complete writing an educational grant proposal. The five phases, define, plan, organize, control, and close, we used by my team, QUATRO, to complete the project and deliver a product to our client, Chuck Spuches.

Team Work and Project Management

Project Management isn't much without the team and the product. As challenging as it may be to manage one's self, it is certainly more of a challenge to manage a group of individuals. Such a challenge can present a variety of differences, such as learning and communication styles, language and comprehension barriers, and work ethics.

What Went Well

We had a rough start, but in the end, our *team* is what went well.

As this was an online class, most of our collaborative work was completed online using the team discussion board, file exchange, and collaboration area. However, "applying the right [team] disciplines, although facilitated by technology, was not superseded by technology." (Katzenbach and Smith, 2001). As the Katzenbach and Smith article suggested, we met face-to-face early on. We established the early goals and team etiquette. Unfortunately, not all members

were at the initial face-to-face meetings. It wasn't until we established a routine, weekly, virtual/online meeting that we started getting 100% participation. These meetings continued to work very well until we had less than a week to finish the actual proposal draft and I felt we needed to meet face-to-face. As suggested by Katzenbach and Smith (2001), virtual meetings are fine for sharing information, but they lack some of the essential collaboration capabilities that only a face-to-face meeting provides. When it was getting down to the line, we needed to be able to talk to each other in real-time, face-to-face, and work out all the issues of the grant proposal once and for all.

As the project manager for our group, I needed to (1) learn to plan and act, (2) focus on the project's end, and (3) be a manager and a leader. (Baker, Baker, and Campbell, 2003). I'd like to think that I did well in achieving these competencies. Personally, I felt that I was probably the least *qualified* for a project management position on our team. It was my privilege to work with such seasoned professionals in their given fields. Each had years of experience in educating and working with groups on various projects. The last thing I wanted to do was to belittle the qualifications and expertise of my team mates. I hoped to be a leader by example rather than by dictation.

A quality that I think I possess is that I am able to focus on the *big picture*. I had a very competent team, but at times it was helpful to be able to re-gain their focus on the project end. I reminded them of *our* goals. Dividing the project deliverables between the different team members worked well at keeping everyone involved and on task. We used a system of writer and editor; one person was responsible for the creation of a particular document and another person was responsible for the editing of that document. We rotated these responsibilities so that the work-load was equally spread out between all team members. I think everyone felt as though

they were a contributing member of the team and no one seemed to feel that there were any unfair expectations on any one person.

Another challenge that I think went well in the end, was the language barriers that one member faced. One member of our team is an international student from Korea. He has a degree in English and probably knows *grammar* better than I do, however, communication and comprehension has been difficult for him. A practice that developed between he and I, was a sort of debriefing following every virtual meeting. He would write down questions of words or concepts that he did not understand throughout our team conversations and he and I would discuss them after the other team members had disbursed. I think this process worked well because it did not interrupt the normal flow of the meeting, but it allowed him to be a fully participating member of the team through his understanding of the team visions and ability to *stay on the same page*.

What Didn't

Honestly, very few things *didn't* go well for our team.

“Scope creep is a real phenomenon.” (Brown, 2000). This is something I have experienced in this and other projects I have worked on. We had trouble initially understanding the difference between the project and the product. We often had to review our project goals. We also had trouble choosing an agency and request for proposal (RFP). This was difficult to accomplish in the virtual environment. We struggled to communicate the different choices.

Later we had trouble staying focused on the requirements of the proposal. We choose the particular RFP specifically because it met our criteria and it had an in-depth description. The proposal outlined step-by-step what was required for approval.

What Would I Do Differently as a Team Member and Project Manager

Overall, I think Team QUATRO worked well as a team. We all contributed to the completion of the *project* deliverables and the grant proposal *product*. I didn't want to be a controlling manager. I simply wanted to lead the competent individuals that I was teamed up with. I think I accomplished this.

Conclusion

In conclusion I think this course and specifically the project were very beneficial. Project management (PM) skills are invaluable in many different situations. I've worked in team situations before. There are some things that I have done within a team that fits in with the PM phases as discussed in the Weiss and Wysocki text(1992), whether I realized it or not. Many of the specific organizational reports, however, I think are often taken for granted. They are beneficial to realizing the scope and keeping it in focus. The product, writing a grant proposal, is also a necessary skill that is not covered in any other course offered at this time in the Instructional Design, Development, & Evaluation (IDD&E) program or elsewhere in the Syracuse University system. At this program level, in graduate and doctoral work, writing a technical document or grant proposal is invaluable. I think the course is appropriately offered as a core to the IDD&E program.

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