

Project Management
by Gary R. Heerkens
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Discussion Guide

The following discussion questions are intended to facilitate the use of *Project Management* by Gary R. Heerkens (McGraw-Hill, 2002) in training programs to help people master this subject.

These questions are suggestions for starting and structuring discussions. They bring up the main points of each chapter. The discussion facilitator would follow up on the answers to generate discussion. Depending on the situation, the facilitator may ask the participants to apply the content of the chapter to their specific situations, such as working with examples from their areas, either with the facilitator serving as project manager and the participants as members of the project team or with each participant acting as project manager for his or her choice of projects.

Chapter 1. Congratulations ... You're the Project Manager!

Discussion questions:

- What is a project?
- What challenges and opportunities does a project present for the “accidental project manager”?
- What are the advantages and the disadvantages of managing a project?
- Why is project management both an art and a science? What does the art involve? What does the science involve?

Chapter 2. About Projects and Project Management

Discussion questions:

- What are the four key characteristics of a project?
- What are some projects in your organizations? How would you compare them in terms of the four key characteristics?
- What are the four phases of the project life cycle? What happens during each of these phases?
- What are the eight steps in the project management process?
- How would you assess the organization context in your department or whatever unit in which you would be managing a project?
- What are the four levels of success for evaluating the results of a project?

Chapter 3. The Role of the Project Manager

Discussion questions:

- What are the four areas of responsibilities for a project manager?
- What is the responsibility vs. authority trap? How much of a concern is it in your organizational context?
- What is the conflict between certainty and uncertainty? How much of a concern is it in your organizational context?
- What is the dual responsibility trap? How much of a concern is it in your organizational context?
- What are the four areas of skills required of a project manager? How would you rate yourself in each of these areas? How could you develop in areas in which you feel weak? How could you compensate?
- Think of a project that you've managed or that you might be assigned to manage. In what ways could you get feedback from members of the project team, customers, and your supervisor or manager?

Chapter 4. Defining Your Project

Discussion questions:

- Why is it so important to follow a disciplined approach when managing a project?
- What are the four basic steps for starting a project?
- What is the purpose of a project requirements document? What should it include?
- What are the two basic questions that provide a reality check when establishing the requirements of a project?
- What are the four basic financial metrics used to evaluate projects?
- What are the four steps for performing a cost vs. benefit analysis of a project?
- What is the purpose of a decision matrix? How does it work?
- What are the purposes of a project definition document? What should it include?
- What information should be included in a proposal for management approval of a project?
- What is a project charter? What is its purpose? What should it include?
- What aspects should be considered when evaluating the political environment for a project?

Chapter 5. Building and Maintaining an Effective Team

Discussion questions:

- How defined should a project be when a project team is formed? Why?
- What factors should you consider when selecting people to form a project team?
- How should you prepare for your first meeting with a project team?
- What should you do during your first meeting with a project team?
- What are the five stages in the development of a team? What characterizes each of these stages? How should you lead the team during each stage?
- What are the purposes of team meetings? How should you conduct these meetings?
- What are the two most important points to keep in mind in providing rewards and recognition?
- What are the eight essentials for team members to work effectively on a project?
- What expectations will the team members likely have of you as project manager?

Chapter 6. An Overview of Planning and Estimating

Discussion questions:

- What are the three fundamental dimensions of a project plan?
- What six mistakes do project managers commonly make in planning?
- What are the most important factors in determining how much planning is appropriate for a project?
- What is the fitness-for-use principle?
- What are five methods for obtaining estimates for a project?
- What three items should accompany every estimate?

Chapter 7. Preparing a Detailed Project Plan: Step by Step

Discussion questions:

- What is the purpose of scope management?
- What is a work breakdown structure? What are five reasons for creating a WBS?
- In a WBS, what are the seven key characteristics or dimensions to consider?
- What is a responsibility assignment matrix?
- What is the purpose of a network diagram? What graphical convention is most commonly used for drawing a network diagram? How does it work? What are the three questions that must be answered for each activity?
- In estimating the duration of activities, what two aspects must be considered?
- What is a project control schedule? What six factors could affect this schedule?
- What is the critical path? How is it derived? Why is it important to identify the critical path?
- What are the two types of costs to understand when developing a project budget? What is the difference between them?

Chapter 8. Dealing with Risk and Uncertainty

Discussion questions:

- In the context of project management, how is risk defined?
- What are the four steps in addressing risk?
- When identifying potential problems that could affect a project, what two basic dimensions do you need to quantify?
- What are the six options for dealing with risk and potential problems?
- What is the PET approach to determining the duration of project activities? How does it work?
- What are the five basic steps in estimating project costs with software applications?

Chapter 9. Maintaining Control During Project Execution

Discussion questions:

- In the context of project management, how is control defined? What three parameters must be considered in maintaining control of a project?
- What are the four types of project targets, the four perspectives for evaluating the outcomes of a project?
- What are the two basic objectives for a project plan?
- What are the specific types of information that you should get in order to assess your progress toward each of the four types of project targets?
- What four methods are most commonly used to get information about the status of a project?
- What is the essence of classic cost analysis? What are the two disadvantages of this method? Why does a cost analysis spreadsheet work better?
- What is the earned value technique for analyzing costs and schedule? What is the advantage of this technique over the classic cost analysis and the cost analysis spreadsheet?
- What are the two reasons why the performance of deliverables can fall short of attaining the targets of functionality and quality?
- What are the basic strategies for recovering from difficulties encountered in a project?

Chapter 10. Managing the Project Interfaces

Discussion questions:

- What are project interfaces?
- What are the characteristics that make people stakeholders in a project?
- What seven things should you know about each stakeholder?
- What are seven key internal stakeholder groups?
- What is an internal customer?
- What is a project sponsor?
- What are four main external stakeholder groups?
- In addition to the people who are internal and external stakeholders, what four entities are project interfaces?
- What is the importance of identifying and understanding stakeholders in terms of expectations?
- What is the importance of identifying and understanding stakeholders in terms of authority and influence?

Chapter 11. Project Communication and Documentation

Discussion questions:

- What questions should a project management configuration plan address?
- What elements should a project management configuration plan include?
- Think about the organizational culture and the political environment in which you would most likely be managing a project. Which communication approaches would be best? Why? Which communication approaches would be worst? Why? Which communication media would be best? Why? Which communication media would be worst? Why?
- How would you rate yourself for each of the 18 abilities listed under “communication skills”? How could you improve on the abilities in which you feel weak?
- What are the four major documents generated during the initiation phase of a project? What is the basic purpose for each?
- What are the five major documents generated during the planning phase of a project? What is the basic purpose for each?
- What are the five major documents generated during the execution phase of a project? What is the basic purpose for each?
- What are the three major documents generated during the close-out phase of a project? What is the basic purpose for each?

Chapter 12. Bringing Your Project to a Successful Conclusion

Discussion questions:

- What are three reasons why projects continue that should be terminated? What should organizations do to avoid these three situations?
- What three technical challenges threaten the successful conclusion of a project? How could you recognize these challenges?
- What three project team challenges threaten the successful conclusion of a project? How could you recognize these challenges?
- What three customer challenges threaten the successful conclusion of a project? How could you recognize these challenges?
- What are the key elements for successful closure of a project? To what extent are these elements related to organizational culture? How would you handle them within the context of your unit and organization?
- What is a punch list? How can a project manager use a punch list to close a project?
- What items should be included on a project completion checklist?
- What is a lessons learned study? What should it contain? What questions should you ask about any problems identified in the process? How can you maximize the benefits of your lessons learned for others in the organization? What else might you do within the culture and politics of your particular situation?