

The following was originally presented by me at the 1996 Project World Conference in Santa Clara, CA. It was so popular amongst Project Managers, that I was asked to present it at two additional Project World Conferences during 1997

Although I've evolved over the years, and my approach to Project Management has evolved along with me, the content still "rings true" in 2010, 14 years after I wrote it...hopefully you'll agree 😊

Enjoy! – btw...I've included my speaker notes in this PDF file. just mouse-over the comment bubble on each of the slides to view them. If the comment is too large to read fully, double-click the bubble and a new scrollable window will open

John C. Rea
J.C. Rea and Associates
New Braunfels, Texas
<http://nothingbutwolves.wordpress.com>
john.c.rea@gmail.com



Herding Cats

Cycle Time Reduction from a Team Leader's Perspective

John C. Rea

Three Part Premise

- ☆ Reduction of Cycle Time starts with a fundamental understanding of what **INCREASES** Cycle Time within your environment
- 🕒 Cycle Time is minimized by pro-actively working on the identified problem areas
- 🕒 Cats can be trained

Some Definitions

- Cat

- A bright, talented individual that is prone to change their sense of direction or purpose based on new, interesting, or tangential stimuli
- Herd of Cats
- A group of bright individuals that if left on their own, would not choose the “shortest path”



Focus Areas

- Planning
- Process
- Communication
- Behavior

Plan of Attack

Focus Area

- Specific Issue

- “Symptomatic cat like utterances” (just so you can recognize meowing when you hear it)
 - Observations and insights (the cure will be up to you)

Planning

- Incomplete
 - “Oh, I didn’t think of that”
 - Make sure that the planning is sufficiently detailed so that there are no major surprises
- Inaccurate
 - “Oh, I thought you only wanted a ball park estimate”
 - Identify the degree of accuracy required --There’s a difference between precise and accurate

Planning (cont.)

- Unclear Specifications
 - “Oh, THAT’S what you meant”
 - Ensure that the problem is well understood before a solution is created -- Know the difference between Required and Desired
- Blind Optimism
 - “I bet if they would have asked me, I could have built Rome in a day”
 - Gauge the source -- Bravado is only productive when the results match the expectations

Planning (cont.)

- Missing Resources

- “Oh, I’m sure I’ll have those resources in place by the time I really need them”
 - Watch for the moving hole -- Get commitments early or recruit and train well in advance

- Complexity

- “I’ll do the easy stuff first”
 - Tackle the hard things early -- It’s amazing how long those SIMPLE things will take

Planning (cont.)

- Core Competency

- “I’ve never done Brain Surgery before, but I’d like to try it”
 - Match the right skill set to the right job -- Critical tasks should always be staffed with the best and the brightest

- Contingencies

- “I never make mistakes”
 - If something **MUST** work the first time, be prepared to maneuver rapidly

Planning (cont.)

- Critical Success Factors
 - “What do you mean they can’t supply IT anymore?”
 - Identify and track the relationships and things that you can’t live without
- Risk Assessment
 - “This project is a no-brainer”
 - Early and accurate assessment of risks will ensure that the proper focus and energy is applied

Process

- Rigidity

- “I can’t do anything until all the i’s are dotted, and the t’s are crossed”
 - Watch out for artificial gates -- If progress can be made, get started and make it happen

- Adaptability

- “I can’t do that, it doesn’t fit our process”
 - If the process doesn’t apply, waive or modify the requirement -- Don’t shave off the edges of the square peg to fit it into a round hole

Process (cont.)

- Informality

- “I don’t have the time to write that down”
 - Ensure that critical information is handled in a manner befitting it’s nature

- Training

- “I didn’t know I had to do that”
 - Familiarize everyone with the processes that they will be dealing with -- The more proficient they are, the less time it will take

Communication

- Goals & Objectives

- “I didn’t know we were going to do that”
 - Make sure that everyone is on the same page -- Less confusion will result in fewer errors

- Roles & Responsibilities

- “I didn’t know that was part of my job”
 - Ensure that everyone knows what everyone else is suppose to do -- If left to guess, they might get it wrong

Communication (cont.)

- Status

- “I have good news and bad news”
 - Regular and accurate information flow is essential -- Being in the dark is only good for mushrooms

- Exceptions

- “We have a problem...”
 - It is imperative that unexpected or vital project information be disseminated quickly -- Get it to those who need it without delay

Behavior

- Fear

- “I’m afraid of the dark”

- Clarify the situation -- Illuminate with an effective plan to move past the paralysis

- Panic

- “The sky is falling!”

- Quickly assess the situation and LEAD -- Simultaneous movement in all directions will just prolong the agony

Behavior (cont.)

- Negativity
 - “That will never work”
 - Contradictory opinions are only productive if substantive -- Seek the truth behind the statements
- Dogmatism
 - “That isn’t the way we do that here”
 - Encourage “out of box” thinking -- Arrogance and tunnel vision is never as effective as innovation

Behavior (cont.)

- Denial

- “I know it’s smoking, but I don’t expect it to catch on fire”

- Separate fact from fantasy -- If it looks like a Frog, it’s probably not an Enchanted Prince

- Focus

- “I didn’t finish because I was doing something else”

- Finish what has started before moving on -- A point in every direction is like having no point at all

Behavior (cont.)

- Collaboration

- “Why should I work with them”

- Seeking ideas and assistance from others can ensure that surprises are kept to a minimum -- The whole CAN be greater than the sum of the parts

- Decision Making

- “I didn’t know I had to make the decision”

- Identify decision makers and insist on timely decisions -- Push decision making down to the right levels

Behavior (cont.)

- Accountability
 - “It wasn’t my fault”
 - Clearly establish ownership and expectations --
Throwing it over the wall doesn’t always mean that it’s done
- Duplicity, Incompetence, and Arson
 - No quote required to capture any of these
 - Deal with these behaviors swiftly and effectively --
DO NOT allow them to continue

In Closing...

- New Term and Definition
 - Team of Cats
 - A motivated group of bright individuals that are being led in a clear and effective way resulting in an overall reduction in Time-to-Market.
 - The Next Step
 - Work with these concepts and use them as a Jump Point for re-evaluating how you look at your People and Projects

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