



MANAGING A

PROJECT

THE RIGHT WAY

BY SCOTT W. BRALEY, FAIA, FRSA

Project management is a science and an art. As simple as that statement may seem, it is the key to genuine success for all who are charged with the successful completion of right of way acquisition projects. I first served as a project manager in the late 1970's, and since 1987 I have helped public and private sector members of the planning, acquisition, design and construction industry sort out the subtleties of project management and improve project performance. In this article, I offer a concise definition of project management as well as pinpoint who is responsible for a project's success.

As a science, there is indeed a right way to perform as a project manager and a right way to provide project management services. As an art, there is the opportunity and responsibility to interpret project management in a very individual, project-specific and client-specific manner. Let's look more closely at this interesting and challenging juxtaposition.

What is Project Management?

First, it is prudent and important to understand just what project management means in relation to right of way projects or projects that include right of way acquisition as a key component. Here's a working definition that addresses both what is and why do we perform project management. Universally applicable in both the public and private sectors, this definition is useful in a wide array of projects ranging from wireless carrier acquisitions, to public utilities work to highway development programs. Equally important, it is easily understood by and works well for the diverse mix of project participants including appraisers, engineers, planners, attorneys, property managers, public agency directors and private sector managers.



Project management is a set of services comprising tasks to be performed, activities in which to be involved and results to be achieved. These tasks, activities and results are beyond and in addition to the core professional and technical services that comprise a right of way professional's traditional "scope of services."

Project management is a set of services which are provided to enhance project performance and add assurance of a successful project outcome by setting project-specific objectives, developing a realistic plan to achieve those objectives, monitoring and controlling project activities and ensuring that the desired results are in fact achieved.¹

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What Are the Basic Project Management Services?

Getting the right mix of services

The *right way* to answer this question is to view project management as an artfully balanced combination of essential or core services comprised of tasks, activities and results. Project management the *right way* involves objective setting, planning, organizing, launching, monitoring/controlling and closing. A closer look makes the road ahead a bit clearer, much easier to navigate.

Just as in the Right of Way profession, every successful project begins with a clear and concise understanding of just exactly what the desired end results are. Getting the right answer to this fundamental question is the first and most important aspect of project management. To get the answer, the project manager must answer three key questions:

1. What is the ultimate definition or realization of "success" for this project?
2. What physically and functionally must be accomplished?
3. Who will be the judge of overall performance for the project?

The answers are straightforward and objective – the scientific part of the right way to establish objectives. In addition to these answers, engaging the right constituents, negotiating possibilities and mediating consensus require the artful element of project management in setting objectives.

Once the objectives are known, the next project management "mile-marker" is developing a plan to achieve those objectives. In my experience, I have been most successful when a clear and procedural approach is used. The *right way* to develop a plan is to ask the fundamental questions of: who, what, when, where, why and how much. Equally important in our experience, this scientific approach is made successful by the artful manner in which the questions are ordered. Beginning with the "what," proceeding to "how" and only then addressing "how much" produces optimum results.

Organize and Launch

As you proceed along the project management highway, you will come to organizing and launching. These activities blend science and art more than any other aspect of project management. Organizing the team and resources can and should take on crisp and precise characteristics, while launching project activities and encouraging motivated project participants requires artfully sensitive behavior and charismatic leadership.

During the course of a project, monitoring and controlling become key aspects of project management. Project managers and consultants/trainers have used a highly effective combination of art and science in project monitoring/control. First, begin by redefining the focus of monitoring. Rather than look backward, expand the "right of way" so to speak and look at not only the rear/historical view, but also the current and forward-looking view. Combine these views for the express purpose of predicting what will happen next on the project. This artful form of monitoring has been an invaluable approach for me personally and for the projects I have managed.

Based on this panoramic form of monitoring, you will see control in a different light. Control does not only mean the scientific approach of "getting back on plan" – it also entails the artful approach of refining the plan to ensure you achieve the originally-planned results.

Finally, performing project management the *right way* means the project must be closed effectively. In closing the project, you come full circle and use the original objectives as your guide to scientifically compare "actual vs. planned" results. Were the objectives accomplished? Were satisfactory results achieved within the allowed or prescribed resource limits? Does the project meet or exceed the appropriate physical and functional performance standards?





services well beyond the basics. These may often include hard and scientific services such as systematic procedural reviews of information disclosure, statistical comparison of cost and fee structures, legal and procedural control of confidential data as well as the use of sophisticated technical and management information systems.

Similarly, performing project management services also involves skillful and artful attention to building trust and collaboration among all participants, employing the power of systems thinking, building effective relationships, and conducting all project activities in a highly ethical manner.

Who is Responsible for Project Management?

It is a genuinely intriguing paradox of project management to say that no one person is singularly responsible for a project's success – yet, each project should have only one person, the right project manager, who is responsible to ensure the project succeeds.

Indeed, project success is the result of a myriad of contributing individuals, elements and influences. The fundamental activity that aligns these powerful forces is project management. The right way to achieve success is for all project participants – owners and right of way professionals alike – to make a commitment to perform project management. This means a commitment of tangible resources and a willingness to follow prescribed procedures – and it means giving one individual the responsibility and authority to manage the project.

Similarly, project close involves a measure of artful interpretation. Did the outcomes meet the expectations of all participants' and stakeholders? Did the project team perform at an appropriate level of proficiency and productivity? Were key lessons learned and did individuals grow in the process? Has public and private sector welfare been enhanced? Project management consultants and trainers for professionals and their clients should provide a clearly identifiable mix of services – tasks, activities and results – that blend science and art.

Are there Project Management Services Beyond the Basics?

Yes indeed.

In today's market, including both public and private sector projects, providing project management the right way most often involves

The Project Manager is the single individual charged with the responsibility of and given the commensurate authority for ensuring that project management is considered and accomplished for the project.

The PM is the individual who: ensures project-specific objectives are identified; a realistic plan is put forward to accomplish those objectives; the project team and resources are organized and focused to achieve the desired outcomes; project activities are monitored and controlled to achieve desired results; and the project is brought to a definitive close to satisfaction of all who have appropriate authority, involvement and interest.

The PM may not perform any or all of these functions. Nonetheless, the PM is ultimately responsible to ensure they are performed satisfactorily and in compliance with applicable and prescribed standards of professionalism, technical quality, ethical performance and commercial success.



Project Management – The Right Way

We hear a lot about project management in our industry. There are a wide variety of interpretations and opinions.

In my personal experience with managing nearly \$2 billion in built construction, project management is the singularly most important aspect of ensuring project success. Moreover, at the personal level, developing effective project manager skills is a fundamentally important and essential aspect of the right of way professional's career advancement.

Project Management is a core competency of our shared professions and is the right core competency to be developed if we, as professionals, are to be of maximum service and optimum success in our industry. ❖

REFERENCES

¹Working definition of project management developed by Braley Consulting and Training



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