

Procedural Impacts on Project Management

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Effective project management calls for a consistent but flexible organizational policy.

Project management is an organizational concept. Effective management of any project begins with the procedures the organization develops. Procedures not only outline how and when something should occur but also establish controls to measure effectiveness.

Discussing policy and procedures is like talking about a paint-by-number drawing. Policy is the outline and the procedures are the numbers telling you what paints to use to fill in the picture. Procedures establish the foundation for carrying out the mission of the organization. This foundation is the basis for budgets, staffing, scheduling, and strategy. When writing procedures, the author has to be able to predict what impact a change may have on the organization and justify the use of a new procedure.

In approaching the acquisition of right of way on any project, the first step is the development of the project plan. Often in developing the plan, the existing procedures are taken for granted as underlying factors in approaching the project. They are, however, the measurement of success or failure of how the project was handled.

The intent of any procedure should be to guide the process along established policy lines. In dealing with the public on similar issues, an organization has to have

a consistent approach. The failure to develop this consistency creates the impression of disarray within the company. People affected by a project expect to be treated the same as everyone else, regardless of their geographical location.

Need for Discretion

No planning process can anticipate the specific needs of the individuals and companies affected by a right of way project. In addition, a procedure written today will still have to work within the cultural changes of the organization tomorrow. Projects continue through reorganizations and staffing changes, and an effective procedure should be flexible enough to remain effective throughout the structural changes. Someone else in the organization may carry out a function previously assigned to another, but the process remains relatively stable.

This is not to say that procedures don't or shouldn't change. Legislative and policy changes require procedural change. In developing directives, the decision is made on what issues are so fundamental that no divergency will be accepted. In other areas, procedures should be developed so that problems can be addressed by an experienced individual through the use of options. Options allow decisions to be made that can address unanticipated problems.

For example, an organization may require land to be appraised before offering to purchase it. An appraisal is a mandatory requirement. The number of appraisals to

have made on different types of property may be optional within set criteria such as complexity, cost, etc.

In managing a project, property owners expect the representatives of an organization to be able to address specific questions or concerns. They expect this to be handled efficiently and in a timely manner. Credibility is at risk when this does not occur. Whether your procedures allow for discretion or not, sometime, someplace, an interpretation will be made as to how to implement a specific procedure in addressing a specific need. Since this is true, you might as well allow for it. When procedures are developed along tight constraints, you remove the need for decision making from the process. When this happens, your first-line staff is not given the opportunity to develop decision-making experience in technical areas. If this continues, one of two things occurs. One, your management is not able to make decisions necessary to produce the product, or two, they don't learn to make decisions until they're in management and their mistakes are more costly.

The writer interprets the policy directive and develops a draft recommendation. This is then distributed to the user group for the purpose of assessing cost and impact.

It is the responsibility of the user group to estimate the consequences of the draft procedure. What impact will it have on budgets, staff, schedule, and strategy? The responses are then returned with the consequences outlined, including recommendations for modifications or discretion.

This feedback expands how the procedure is looked at by the writer. The initial focus was to write and implement a procedure to address a problem. Now the focus should be to address the problem in a way that improves the entire process. This keeps the writer from losing touch with the environment within which the procedure is going to have to work.

This response is then decoded by management. The first question that has to be readdressed is whether the procedure is fundamental to the successful completion of the overall mission of the organization. If it is, there may not be much room for flexibility. The user group needs to be informed promptly if this is the case, with an explanation as to the reasoning behind the decision.

If discretion can be allowed in imple-

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menting a procedure, the user groups' comments should establish the parameters for developing the options. A standard operating procedure should be developed with the goal of it being used 80% of the time. Options should be available to address the remaining 20%. This establishes consistency, yet allows the unforeseen to be handled as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Once the changes are made to the draft, the user group and writer group should

meet to resolve any outstanding issues. This creates buy-in by everybody, and the procedures become ours instead of theirs.

Summary

When procedures are recognized for what they are—the foundation of the organization—the need for addressing their impact on project management becomes

clear. The process for developing procedures also becomes a team approach, ensuring a more effective handling of the tasks involved in bringing a project in on time and within budget. **IRWA**

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