The Top 10 Laws of Project Management

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Management Concepts
The Laws for the Laws

- Real person said or wrote
- Quote has a documented source
- Has application to project management
- Might not have been stated as a “law”
- Presentation may paraphrase the quote
  - See white paper for original version and source
Session Objectives

• List the top 10 laws of project management
• Explain their backgrounds and corollaries
• Examine their application to improve project performance
• Learn why you should never base a presentation on quotations
The Problems with Quotes

- Multiple sources
- Multiple versions
- The fog of time
- Entering the vernacular
  - Foregone conclusion
  - Neither rhyme nor reason
  - One fell swoop
  - Seen better days
  - A sorry sight

William Shakespeare (supposedly)
“Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.”

- Cicero
- Oliver Wendell Holmes
- Kahlil Gibran
- Benito Mussolini
- John F. Kennedy
- Orson Wells
Who Said?

There are three kinds of lies:

– Lies
– Damn Lies
– Statistics

• Benjamin Disraeli
• Mark Twain
Growth of the PMBOK
1. Augustine’s Law

A bad idea executed to perfection is still a bad idea

– Norman R. Augustine

– Corollary

• A good idea executed poorly is of no use to anyone
Using Augustine’s Law

• Validating the Project’s Strategic Alignment
  – For every project you choose to do
  – You give up an infinite number of projects

• Using Control Gates in the Planning Process
  – Building upon valid and verified deliverables
2. Lakein’s Law

Failing to plan is planning to fail

– Alan Lakein

– Corollary

• Exactly because we lack time to plan, we should take time to plan
Using Lakein’s Law

- Avoiding the “Just Do It” Mentality
- Planning to Plan: Setting Expectations in the Project Charter
What’s Missing?

Dinner Party Project

- Project Management
- Location
- Food & Drink
- Guests
  - Kitchen
  - Dining Room
  - Bathroom
    - Table & Chairs
    - Settings
    - Decorations
Writing the Rules of the Game

• Determine the major shortcomings in a typical project
  – Poor scope stability
  – Time consuming approvals process
  – Not enough time to plan

• Write an assumption about each in the charter
3. Saint Exupéry’s Law

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away

– Antoine de Saint Exupéry

– Corollary

• Deliver to the requirement, no less, and just as importantly, no more
Using Saint Exupéry’s Law

• Verifying the WBS
  – The test of sufficiency
  – The test of necessity

• The Problem with Exceeding Expectations
  – Behind Schedule, Over Budget
  – Ahead of Schedule, Under Budget
Hitting the Target

- Under budget
- Behind schedule
- Over budget
- Ahead schedule

Budget

Schedule

1.0
1.05
1.10

.90
.95
1.0
1.05
1.10

.90
.95

Under budget
Behind schedule
Over budget
Behind schedule
Under budget
Ahead schedule
Over budget
Ahead schedule

Management Concepts

Building Bridges to Business 2009

PMI-San Diego Conference
4. Fitzgerald’s Law

There are two states to any large project:

– Too early to tell
– Too late to stop

– Ernest Fitzgerald

– Corollary
  • The longer a project is underway the more difficult it is to terminate
Using Fitzgerald’s Law

- The Deliverable Orientation and Earned Value Management

Dinner Party Project

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Taylor, Nova, Sam
Using Fitzgerald’s Law

- **Stability of the CPI (Cost Performance Index)**
- **Once a project gets in trouble, it stays in trouble**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Completion (% of BAC)</th>
<th>Stability of the CPI (Likelihood of significant change in performance)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
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<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>

Source: Christensen & Heise
Using Fitzgerald’s Law

• Project Termination is Not the Same as Failure
  – Sunk cost is just that
5. Parkinson’s Law

Work expands to fill the time available

– C. Northcote Parkinson

– Corollary
  • It is the busiest man who has time to spare
Using Parkinson’s Law

• Deadlines for Everything
  – If you want something to get done, give it to a busy man
  – The “student syndrome” will still apply

• Implications for the Critical Path Method
The Power of the Network

- Please repeat after me
  - I solemnly vow
  - To use this awesome power
  - Only for good
6. Constantine’s Law

A fool with a tool is still a fool

– Larry Constantine

– Corollary

• A fool with a tool is a more dangerous fool
Using Constantine’s Law

• Why PM Methodology is “Software Agnostic”
• Applying Leverage Through the Wise Use of Tools
  – Training vs. education
7. Graham's Law

If they know nothing of what you are doing, they suspect you are doing nothing

– Robert J. Graham

– Corollary

• If someone tells you too much about what they are doing, they may actually be doing nothing
Using Graham's Law

• The Communications Management Plan
  – The first component of the project plan
• Stakeholder Management and (Re)setting Expectations
  – The great differentiator
Managing Expectations

Project Achievement

Stakeholder Expectations
Managing Expectations

Stakeholder Expectations

Project Achievement
Perception vs. Reality

The perception of success is largely a matter of lowering expectations

Kinser’s Law of Stakeholder Management
8. Murphy’s Law

If anything can go wrong, it will

– Edward Aloysius Murphy, Jr.

– Corollary

• If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something
Using Murphy’s Law

• Managing Stakeholder’s Risk Tolerances
  – Risk homeostasis

• Using Risk Management Planning to Control Murphy
  – Playing the odds
  – Defensive design
9. O’Brochta’s Law

Project management is about applying common sense with uncommon discipline

– Michael O’Brochta

– Corollary

  • Great project managers have mastered the basics and have the discipline to adhere to them
Using O’Brochta’s Law

• Project Management is *Not* Rocket Science
  – The two most feared concepts on PMP exam
    • Critical Path Method
    • Earned Value Management

• Defining and Utilizing Discipline
  – Developing good habits
10. Kinser’s Law

About the time you finish doing something, you know enough to start

– James C. Kinser

– Corollary

• If you don’t write that down, you won’t remember it for when you need it
Using Kinser’s Law

• The Importance of Prototyping
  – You never get it right the first time

• Transitioning the Lessons Learned
  – Most lessons learned serve two functions
    • Credenza weights
    • Dust bunny collectors
Conclusion

By applying these principles in the daily practice of their craft, project managers can increase the likelihood of success in their projects.

- Augustine’s Law
- Lakein’s Law
- Saint Exupéry’s Law
- Fitzgerald’s Law
- Parkinson’s Law
- Constantine’s Law
- Graham’s Law
- Murphy’s Law
- O’Brochta’s Law
- Kinser’s Law
Questions & Answers
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