10 STEPS TO

Successful Project Management

Lou Russell

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Let’s face it, most people spend their days in chaotic, fast-paced, time- and resource-strained organizations. Finding time for just one more project, assignment, or even learning opportunity—no matter how career enhancing or useful—is difficult to imagine. The 10 Steps series is designed for today’s busy professional who needs advice and guidance on a wide array of topics ranging from project management to people management, from business planning strategy to decision making and time management, from return-on-investment to conducting organizational surveys and questionnaires. Each book in this ASTD series promises to take its readers on a journey to basic understanding, with practical application the ultimate destination. This is truly a just-tell-me-what-to-do-now series. You will find action-driven language teamed with examples, worksheets, case studies, and tools to help you quickly implement the right steps and chart a path to your own success. The 10 Steps series will appeal to a broad business audience from middle managers to upper-level management. Workplace learning and human resource professionals along with other professionals seeking to improve their value proposition in their organizations will find these books a great resource.
Like yours, my business life and my personal life have been very chaotic this year. Ironically, I have been writing this project management book, offering others advice about how to juggle all the projects in their lives while I haven’t been doing a very good juggling job myself. I love teaching project management, and this, my third book on the topic, has enabled me to do what I love and has helped me get my own project management back where it should be. I hope it will be helpful to you in the same way.

I work in the real world. Academic project management is a nice starting place, but not enough for the complexity of the things that I want to manage. As I speak, the dog is scratching the door and my husband is rewiring the stereo system at full volume in the family room. My teenager’s boyfriend will be here any minute and then we’re all off to church later this evening. One daughter wants me to look at the IKEA website and help her (with my credit card) redesign her room. The other daughter wants me to help her load CDs on her new Chocolate cell phone. It’s the week after Christmas, and the decorations are piled in the hall, near a foothill of laundry. Been here?

Professionally, my 20-year-old consulting company, Russell Martin & Associates, has been redefined at least 20 times. Right now, project management is critical to our ability to survive and grow. Like you, I didn’t have time to do anything else, especially write a book. Sales were slow last year and we were scrambling to evolve our marketing strategy and product focus. Around this time, I heard David Norton speak. He shared this statistic: less than 10 percent of all companies successfully implement their strategies. I was convinced that if we could not implement our strategy, we’d be closed by the end of 2006. It was also motivating to hear that most of our competitors were likely to be unsuccessful at their strategies.
I organized our strategy into projects and explicitly named project and task managers. My staff are not project managers, and I had overestimated how much they understood (ironic, since we are so busy teaching others!). We prioritized our projects and worked the plan. Making the transition to this approach is still evolving; unfortunately, you can’t just create a plan and then walk away. The edges are always shifting. We often revisit the questions, What is a project? and Where does everything else go? But we’ve made dramatic changes, and I’m more confident that people move through change more easily when it’s clear what is expected of them. This directive clarity is what project management brings.

The point is to communicate. The more chaos, the more temptation to run and hide, but the more critical it is to communicate. In my business this has been a constant challenge. In our customers’ businesses, it’s exponentially more challenging.

Complex project management software, techniques, and methods are very useful when you’re doing large, “cross-silo,” mission-critical projects. We’ve worked with very large, global customers who have tried to implement rigorous, cross-functional project management strategies. They attempt to go from anarchy (everyone doing what they want) to dictatorship (everyone blindly following the process), but eventually find they need to come back to the middle—to real project management. That’s my expertise.

In a sense, my company has carved a niche translating academic/theoretical project management to real-life project managers in the business trenches. We provide project management learning to training organizations, information technology (IT) units, and often entire corporations. A good project manager cannot hide behind a methodology. Good project management requires a person who can think, a person who knows how to pick the best approach for a specific project. You’ll find in this book that my 10 steps parallel a rigorous approach while backing off the complexity a bit.

These same large project management tools and techniques can be roadblocks when you’re managing the kinds of projects filling most of your personal project portfolio. I’ve tried to write a book to
share with you a “slimmed-down” version of the best of project management. I know that if you implement any one of these steps, your project success will improve; and if you implement all of them, you’ll be much more successful than you are now.

Many of you are unexpected project managers. Although you never dreamed you’d be a project manager, suddenly your whole work life revolves around projects. You’re the manager on some of these projects, some you participate in, and you compete with others for scant resources. The project manager with the organizational skills necessary to manage this project maze will thrive. That’s what I hope this book will help you develop—the ability to navigate the real world of your projects.

This book and companion CD-ROM are my attempt to outline the 10 most important things that a person needs to do to improve his or her capacity and reduce the stress level. Whether it’s your workload or your family schedule, it’s not likely that the amount of chaos is going to diminish soon. What I’ve written here is not an organizational approach, but it will fit nicely into whatever policy your company has. Most of our customers feel the same way. Most have implemented a formal project management methodology but have not been able to realize the hoped-for benefits.

And now it’s your turn, reader. Use this book to become more resilient and agile. Practice flexible structure—at all times have a plan for focus, but always be ready to change when the situation dictates. Learn to sit quietly and think rather than just jump up and do. Feel free to contact me with your questions as you learn. (My email address is lou@russellmartin.com, and my phone number is 317.475.9311.) I’ll be working on these things with you. Peace.

Acknowledgments

My ability to manage projects is only as good as my home team. Thanks to Doug, Kelly, Kristin, and Katherine for keeping it all together as I sneaked out to write early every morning. I am most proud of my family project.
Thanks, also, to Mark Morrow (my editor at ASTD) for patience as I worked through this book and my challenges this year. Mark, you are a good friend.

Thanks to Margie Brown, Vija Dixon, Carol Mason, and our newest team member Tina Osborn for undying support and energy in making our transition from an event-oriented to a project-oriented company.

This year, I've had the privilege to employ and work with some unbelievably good project managers. I would like to thank Mary Cook, Janice Daly, and Susan Vaughn for sharing their abilities to manage complexity and change.

Huge thanks to Christine Cotting, editor-extraordinaire, able to make you laugh while you're avoiding your writing. She has become a dear friend through this adventure.

Finally, I dedicate this book to the other side of my brain, Vija Dixon, who is beginning the most courageous fight of her life. PHAO (Pray Hard and Often).

Lou Russell
May 2007
When you improve your capacity to manage projects, you affect a large chunk of your life, so my goal for you as you move through this book has two parts:

1. that you realize how much of your time actually is spent on project management, both at work and at home
2. that you learn simple, useful ways to improve your project management velocity.

When you go looking for a book on project management, you have a lot of choices, but many of the books are written for people who are certified project managers or are running large organizationwide projects at global companies. Many of us need a complementary but simpler approach.

I've found expert information in surprising places, from NASA to the women who run the Christmas drive at church. One of the metaphors from NASA that influenced my thinking a great deal is the story of the Three Little Pigs.

Discovering the Basic Principles of Project Management

NASA has a wonderful web magazine called ASK that it uses to share lessons learned on projects. At the January 2006 Professional Development Conference of the National Society of Professional Engineers, NASA's administrator Michael D. Griffin described ASK in this way:
One of the innovations of the Academy is the Academy Sharing Knowledge, or ASK magazine, which gives NASA managers the opportunity to swiftly tell each other about successes, failures and lessons learned. These “after action reports” were featured in a recent issue of Government Executive Magazine as a model for what every federal manager should be able to tap into. (http://www.nasa.gov/pdf/141294main_NSPE_19_Jan_06.pdf)

This award-winning magazine is available to all of us at http://ap pel.nasa.gov/ask/.

A few years ago, Dr. Edward Hoffman edited an early version of the magazine, and he challenged my project management thought process with an editorial about the Three Little Pigs and project management. Here is an excerpt of that editorial:

Remember the fairy tale, “The Three Little Pigs,” and how the first pig built a house of straw? Nice, light, cost-conscious straw. The only problem was the hungry wolf that came along one day and knocked on the door. The wolf asked to be let in, and the pig quite reasonably replied, “Not by the hair of my chinny, chin, chin.” Unfortunately, the wolf simply huffed and puffed and blew the straw house down, and pig number one had to shake his bacon to get to the second pig’s house.

The second pig had nominally improved the quality of construction by using wood. Once again, however, the pigs were forced to scurry when the wolf’s resolve proved stronger than the structure. In the end, our pigs were saved by the foresight, concern for quality and use of top materials by the third pig, who had built his house of brick. The wolf could not get into the house and the pigs survived, presumably to live happily ever after.

At first glance, the lessons are obvious. Be industrious, plan for future threats and never short-change quality specifications. On further review, the difficulty and risks
of project planning are much more complex. (http://
apel.nasa.gov/ask/issues/11/overview/ask11_resources_
directorsdesk.html)

Since childhood we have heard this story and been clearly taught that the two pigs who were lazy and cheap were wrong. The hero of the tale was the pig who took the time to plan and deliver a top-quality brick house. The admonition given to us as children through this story has influenced our project management beliefs as adults: We expect organizations managing projects to approach their work with the same methodical and ultimately successful set of steps that the wise pig used, and we expect these steps to emulate NASA’s legendary success. After all, it was NASA that put men on the moon using less computing power than most high-end calculators have today. Still, however, we all have a nagging voice in our minds telling us that our business will not allow this expensive focus on quality.

NASA itself has had similar challenges recently. NASA has enjoyed a number of project successes since their Apollo achievements, but it also has suffered some tragic setbacks, such as the shuttle disasters. The reasons for project failures at NASA are complex and include faulty oversight, arrogance, and budget cuts—or, more accurately, the real world of project planning. Many of these specific challenges are discussed with surprising candor in ASK magazine.

Hoffman challenges us to look deeper at the players. The “quality” pig would not have been the star had it not been for the wolf.

Imagine the story without the wolf. Suddenly, the third pig becomes a goat. His mug appears on the cover of newspapers exposing and criticizing the flagrant and excessive costs of the brick house. Pigs one and two are lauded for exceptional and efficient construction management, while pig three is used as a case study in mismanagement. The wolf is so vital to the definition of success that one might be led to wonder if pig three contracted with the wolf to harass and threaten the others.
The wolf represents the constraints of this construction project. Like a well-run business, the wise wolf builds a project that meets the unique need at that point in time—in this story, a wolf with very strong breath.

Each of us struggles with our own constraints on our own projects. Many novice project managers try to ignore them, hoping they’ll just go away. They don’t. Constraints require us to be flexible in implementing a project management structure that will move us through chaos to success. And our encounters with those constraints teach us that there is no single path to project management success. Each project is unique. Each project comes with different wolves.

The constraints come from the business. The project may have to be done quickly to meet a regulatory requirement. The project may need to be done on a limited budget because the competitive market demands a cheaper product. The project may have to be done at high quality because people’s lives are at stake. Each project has its own constraints dictated by strategy and the marketplace.

Because the constraints are dictated by the business, successful project management comes from a collaboration nurtured by ongoing communication with the business. In today’s frantic business environment, there’s nothing more challenging than communication. To address that challenge, this book will help you set the stage early for collaboration with your sponsors, and help you continue communicating through the unpredictable surprises that arise. And here’s something that adds to the overall complexity: it isn’t all that rare for a constraint to change after a project has started!

The business tells the project manager the reason that money is being allotted and spent on this project instead of on something else. Initiating this conversation and understanding the business case reveal both the business constraints and the expected business impact of project success. This gives the project manager the background to make adjustments when the project runs into bumps along the way.
You will learn how to build a plan based on your project’s specific business need. Because all projects are unique, each project plan will be different from any other project plan you have built. The model for project management that you’ll learn from this book will be the same, but the way you apply it will depend on the specific business opportunity you’re addressing.

You’ll learn that, after the project begins, everything will change. Your ability to practice “flexible structure” will be tested. Finally, you’ll learn how to end a project, and how to review lessons gained from the experience.

This book is full of checklists, diagramming techniques, models, and processes to help you through each phase of the project. You’ll discover, however, that project management is all about relationships and communication, and that using tools, techniques, and processes alone won’t guarantee success. A fool with a great technique is still a fool. Projects succeed or fail because of people.

And you’ll learn to expect the unexpected. Project management is about risk mitigation, and you have to identify and react to project risk in ways that build rather than destroy collaboration. Again in the words of Hoffman:

In any event, the uncertainty of future events makes project planning a slippery endeavor. Was the third pig a better strategic and tactical planner, or just lucky? Did the use of risk management techniques indicate the probability of marauding wolves? Was the selection of brick based on a cost-benefit analysis of the situation? One will never know. That sort of background information wasn’t included in the fairy tale.

One thing we can say for certain is that experienced project managers realize that environmental realities figure prominently when determining what risks jeopardize a project. To what extent they plan for a wolf at the door probably depends on what experience they have that a wolf will show up there. The dilemma all project managers face is deciding which risks are too costly to
It will be best to read Steps 1 through 10 in order so you are clear how the pieces fit together. Resist the initial urge to skip around. I also recommend that you select a current project on which to work the steps for practice. When you've read the book from beginning to end, you'll be able to jump around to the steps you need when you need them. Use table I.1 to figure out where to go to review material for specific issues.

An Overview of the 10 Steps

Here is a brief overview of the 10 steps to successful project management:

◆ **Step 1: Decide If You Have a Real Project to Manage**—Many of the students in my classes are there because they’ve unexpectedly become project managers. They never planned for this role, but now find that they spend most of their time working on projects. Here you’ll learn how to tell the difference between a task, a process, and a project. Many of the things now on your to-do list really aren’t tasks—they’re projects. By treating them as such, you’ll work more effectively.

◆ **Step 2: Prove Your Project Is Worth Your Time**—In both profit and nonprofit entities, there is a limited amount of money and a finite number of people to get things done. Here you’ll learn how to discern and document the business reason for the project. When you understand the financial part of project management, you clearly will see the impact of projects that wrap up late or come in over budget.

What You’ll Find in This Book

I've broken the project management process into 10 steps and covered each step separately. You'll get the most out of the book if you first read it through without skipping around. I also recommend that you select a current project on which to work the steps for practice. When you've read the book from beginning to end, you'll be able to jump around to the steps you need when you need them. Use table I.1 to figure out where to go to review material for specific issues.
TABLE 1.1

Issues Addressed by Specific Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>General Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You want to learn how to start a project well</td>
<td>2, 3, 4</td>
<td>Investing energy and effort at the beginning of a project pays off at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You want to learn how to plan a project well</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
<td>It helps to build a project plan based on the business constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You want to learn how to manage a project that is under way</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
<td>Practice flexible structure: at all times, have a plan but be ready to bend it when project conditions dictate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You want to learn how to end a project</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Communicate clearly when a project is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You want to grow your own project management competency</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Conducting a post-project review will jump-start your competency—even if you do the review alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re overwhelmed with work and don’t feel that you’re making any progress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>You may be managing tasks rather than projects. Organizing and prioritizing your work by project will improve your ability to deliver more work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ve been assigned a project, but have not been told why this project suddenly is funded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most project managers are not very aware of the financial impact of their projects. It’s important that the company clearly defines the anticipated return-on-investment for each project; it’s equally important that the project manager be aware of this expectation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel that the project boundaries are shifting continually, and that the size of the project is increasing without an equal increase in time and budget</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The primary killer of project success is scope creep. Even if it’s late in the project, it’s never too late to stop and define the scope with the stakeholders. Negotiating more time and money requires a joint agreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued on next page*
### Table I.1, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>General Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A nervous little voice in your head is asking if this project can be done successfully</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Your little voice is always right. It's critical that you take time to brainstorm possible risks that may challenge project success because it gives you the opportunity to build a mitigation plan to avoid or react to those risks. You won’t guess all of them, but you’ll be ready for most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the project team spend all their time fighting among themselves or avoiding each other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Companies are organized to compete across functional areas for resources. These dynamics can paralyze a project, so the project manager must nurture collaboration—it’s the only way to success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s difficult to coordinate the array of things that different people are doing on this project, and sometimes a late activity slows down someone else</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Creating a project plan informs everyone on the project about exactly what's expected of them, when it's due, and how it affects others. Without a solid plan, individuals either will get distracted by other work or will repeatedly interrupt the project manager for information or direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You just got a major change to the project requirements, and you’re afraid you won’t complete the project on time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Project managers must learn to think in contingency terms. Contingency planning is an in-the-moment type of risk management. When change occurs in a project, the project manager must have two or three alternatives to keep the project on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stakeholders keep changing their minds about what they want, and the project is stalled by all the chaos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chaos is the norm in project management, not the exception. Businesses must react at the speed of the Internet to market trends, and this makes the requirements of many projects...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: Manage Scope Creep—Ask 100 people if documenting scope is critical to project success and I bet that 99 percent of them would say “yes.” I also think that at least 70 percent don’t document scope at all. Most people feel that describing the scope in writing requires difficult conversations with busy executives and page after page of contract-like text demanding sign-off. They assume it’s better just to get going on the project. They’re wrong. Here you’ll discover how to document scope graphically to enhance communication and limit scope creep.

Step 4: Identify, Rate, and Manage Risks—A project risk is something that could happen during the project, and it’s something you make plans to mitigate or avoid. By brainstorming at the outset about what could go wrong during the project and how such situations might be managed or mitigated, you take some of the pain of interruption out of project work. Remember, however, that you’ll never think of everything that might happen on a project, and sometimes it’s not worth the extra energy to preplan for a risk that is unstable at best. Flexible structure is an important key to accepting chaos and managing through it.

**Table I.1, continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>General Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You finished your project a month ago, but the stakeholders keep coming in with small changes.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>It seems like a simple concept, but “done” is a tough thing to define for projects. Learn to establish a project’s completion criteria and to communicate and reinforce them effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It seems as if the same mistakes are repeated on every project</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learning how best to invest the time in a post-project review will increase your project management competency and that of the business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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not very likely or won’t have a great impact. Here you’ll learn how to brainstorm and to prioritize risk mitigation.

◆ **Step 5: Collaborate Successfully**—One of the most important things I’ve learned about project management is the usefulness of collaboration. It sounds simple but, in practice, collaboration is extremely difficult. There will be many times when you’re angry with someone on the team or with one of the stakeholders because a promise has been broken, a change has been made, or some other bomb has been dropped. At this moment of anger, you choose between collaboration and payback (a project killer). Here you’ll find how to take a deep breath and create collaboration without regard to the turmoil and personal agendas.

◆ **Step 6: Gather Your Team and Make a Schedule**—In many project management classes, you learn how to make a work breakdown structure to brainstorm the tasks needed in a project, and then how to hook all the tasks together along a timeline. It’s a good academic exercise but is rarely done in the real world. On an actual project, you’re given the end date and a bank of resources that usually seem unreasonable and inadequate, respectively, and you have to fit the tasks you want to do into that tight space. In this step you’ll learn how to create a plan from a fixed date, a fixed budget, and constrained resources.

◆ **Step 7: Adjust Your Schedule**—When the project starts, it’s challenging to monitor how it’s going. Project status meetings can become “who hunts” in which participants spend the entire meeting figuring out who’s at fault. Keeping track of all the people whose work you need at critical times is very difficult. Here you’ll learn quick, repeatable ways to communicate status and keep everyone aligned with the project. You’ll discover some warning signs that reveal the project is drifting into trouble. And we’ll take a look at the importance of conducting those difficult conversations that can get your project back on track.

◆ **Step 8: Embrace the Natural Chaos of People**—Chaos happens—that’s a given. But chaos really is just the result
of people changing their minds, getting angry and frustrated, misunderstanding directions, and working under stress. Here you’ll learn the people skills required to build relationships, manage conflict, and negotiate disagreements.

◆ **Step 9: Know When You’re Done**—Ending a project doesn’t begin when the project is complete; it begins in Steps 1 through 4. Clearly defining and communicating what “done” means throughout a project are critical aspects of ending well. This step helps you define and communicate clear completion criteria.

◆ **Step 10: Follow Up to Learn Lessons**—The most important and least practiced project management skill is the ability to do a post-project review. Having the discipline to set aside time and reflect on a project, alone or with others, ensures that future projects will be better managed. In this step you’ll learn to apply a standard template to help capture lessons learned during the project. You’ll also learn when and how to facilitate a follow-up discussion.

**Topics Covered in the Steps**

You’ll find the following topics covered in most of the steps:

◆ **Time to Complete**—gives the project manager a general sense of how long it will take to finish the work in a step and describes the factors that influence the time required.

◆ **Stakeholders**—describes those who have a vested interest in the project. This section helps you identify the people with whom you should spend most of your limited time, especially those with whom you’ll need to communicate most frequently.

◆ **Questions to Ask**—tells you what to ask and of whom to ask it. This section helps you pose well-thought-out questions about the project requirements. Succinct and appropriate questions show your respect for your stakeholders by taking as little of their time as possible.

◆ **Project Manager’s Toolkit**—presents the tools, techniques, and processes you’ll use to accomplish the step successfully.
You can try out everything you find in this section on your own current project.

- **Communication**—explains how and what to communicate in the step. In earlier sections, you’ve read about stakeholders, the questions to ask them, and the tools and techniques you’ll use to complete the step. Communication includes determining what questions or documents will be sent to stakeholders either to get their feedback or to keep them in the loop about the project’s status.

- **What If I Skip This Step?**—describes the risk you take if you skip a specific step in managing the project. This section helps you make a conscious evaluation of potential shortcuts, realizing that there may be times when it makes sense to skip some steps.

- **Lurking Landmines**—points out common problems that may occur in the step. This section shows you that “surprises” are predictable.

- **Step Checklist**—offers a quick review of the step. Use this as you grow in project management competency to make sure that you haven’t forgotten critical activities in the step.

Finally, you will find many other elements, including pointers, tools, tables, figures, worksheets, and examples that show you how to use tools and techniques. These valuable resources are provided for you to print out from the companion CD-ROM. To provide you with a practical sample, I’ll use a blog project as the case study throughout the steps.

**The Dare Model of Project Management**

In this book you’ll read about my project management model. It’s called the Dare to Properly Manage Resources Model—the Dare Model, for short (*Project Management for Trainers*, ASTD, 2000). The model has these four phases:

1. **Define**—Explain why the business is committing resources to this project instead of spending the money on something else.
2. **Plan**—Given the business need, describe how people and other resources will be assigned to project tasks.

3. **Manage**—Adapt to the changing project by practicing “flexible structure.” This is a phrase I use to explain a dichotomy in managing projects: At all times you have a plan (structure), but at all times you’re ready to adapt the plan (flexible) when it no longer meets the needs of the business. You’ll find this phrase often in the descriptions of tools and techniques that build adaptability into the project management process.

4. **Review**—Learn from the project experiences to grow future project success.

You’ll find a schematic of this model in Step 1 (figure 1.2), with lists of tasks for each phase. This model is based on the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) published and supported by the Project Management Institute (www.pmi.org). The 10 steps in this book are consistent with the PMBOK as well. You’ll read a more complete explanation of this model in Step 1.

**The Three Pigs**

You’ll find in each of the steps that I adapt the tale of the Three Little Pigs to illustrate some common project dynamics. I’ve also used the story in a few places to give you practice in one or another aspect of project management. You won’t miss any crucial information if you skip the stories, but you may find it comforting to know that you’re not the first person to see insanity on a project. I’ve named the three pigs to illustrate their focus and their project management style: *Speedy* likes to do things fast, *Goldy* likes to save money, and *Demmy* (with homage to W. Edwards Deming) likes high-quality work. As their adventures with BB Wolf unfold, you’ll read how each of these types of project managers adds value and makes mistakes on every project.
One Caveat Before You Begin

If you were hoping for an infallible and reproducible to-do list that guarantees your success on any project with any constraints, you won’t find it here. Some projects are impossible. I’ve never been on one, but I have had customers who have. In most cases, there are alternatives and creative adjustments that can make an impossible project possible. And many projects, although possible, are very difficult.

Every project is unique, and every one will present you with something you’ve never had to deal with before. I once heard information technology consultant Tim Lister say, “If you do two different projects the same way, you have done both incorrectly.” My experience confirms that. I do apply the same model to all my projects, but the detail work in each one is completely different because the people and business issues involved are unique.

A good project management approach, combined with appropriately used tools and techniques chosen by a good project manager, creates project management success. To that end, I make the following assumptions in offering you this book:

◆ You really want to be successful with your projects.
◆ You’re willing to step up and be accountable for that success.
◆ You’re willing to learn and grow as a project manager.
◆ You’re willing to become more agile and collaborative in that journey.

If this sounds like you, I’m excited to share with you my successes and failures in project management. Our guiding principle going forward will be flexible structure. At all times, we’ll have a plan for making a project successful, and at all times, we’ll be willing to adapt that plan and create a new plan when everything changes.
In the mid-1990s, companies were beginning to create e-commerce sites. As the owner of a small business, I felt that we would need an e-commerce site as well. Whenever I have an idea of something I’d like to do, I throw it in my task list to make sure I don’t forget it. I always put a reminder date on it, so that it pops up in a couple of weeks when I’ll (supposedly) have more time to deal with it. “Build e-commerce site” continued to pop up every two weeks for a couple of months. My response was to add a couple of weeks to the date and push it out again.

Think about what putting something on your task list means. When I added that item, I thought that someday I’d find myself with an hour of uninterrupted time and I’d just knock out an e-commerce site. In those terms, that’s ridiculous. Building such a website was pretty time consuming and complex, and it certainly couldn’t be checked off in an hour or so. The real reason that task resisted completion was that I never took the time to break it into the steps necessary to complete it.
Happy Dale Pig Farm

was a very safe place. Ma and Pa Oink nestled their brood of three beautiful piglets together in a corner of the barnyard. Even as babies, the piglets showed very different personalities. First-born Speedy was always on the move, getting himself into everything. Goldy, the middle child, hoarded little found items in piles away from the others. Demmy, the youngest, was practical and very organized. He helped his pig-sibs and the other babies in the yard when they got into trouble. Even the plucky little chicks depended on Demmy to teach them the ways of the farm.

But over one seemingly cozy night, everything at Happy Dale changed. New managers took over the farm—folks who drove sleek black sedans instead of pickup trucks and wore Armani instead of overalls. The pigs were shoved into tiny pens in long, metal barns. They weren’t allowed outside and spent their days eating and sleeping. Rumor had it that even the chickens were in prison.

The Oinks were worried, but they thought it best that the family stick together and wait for these new people to move on and for Happy Dale life to return to normal. At least inside they were protected from that infamous BB Wolf. They’d heard the chickens’ stories about relatives who’d wandered too close to the fences, and the Oinks knew BB would eat them all up if they left the farm.

For his part, Demmy didn’t see it the way his parents did. He thought the farm managers seemed content with the “new normal,” and he didn’t believe things would ever return to the way they’d been before. Demmy was a little pig with a big dream of a better life, and he was willing to trade safety for satisfaction. He’d risk a run-in with BB Wolf. He figured a good plan would help him avoid the wolf and recover the freedom he remembered.

So, while the older Oinks snuffled and shifted in their sleep the next moonless night, Demmy woke his brothers, whispered his plan, and wiggled with Speedy and Goldy through the door slats and out of the not-so-happy dale.
In his classic book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (2004) illustrated the difference between strategic (important and non-urgent) and tactical (important and urgent) activities (figure 1.1). He explained that the more discipline we have to complete strategic activities, the less firefighting we do, thereby reducing the number of tactical activities that interrupt us daily. Many of the important activities lurking on your to-do list actually are strategic projects. As the tactical, easily checked-off tasks monopolize our time, we get more and more behind.

As I write this, I’m reminded of a task on my list that I’ve pushed off continually for a couple of years now: join a few speakers’ bureaus. I have delegated some of the first steps but never have taken the time to really manage this as a project. This is the year!

**Projects vs. Tasks**

In today’s chaotic business climate, multitasking is the norm. Jobs have been trimmed and companies are doing more with less. The roles and responsibilities have to evolve to deal with the chaos; they cannot be defined clearly enough before there is a need to adapt again. People are juggling multiple projects and often acting as both project manager and team. More frequently, people are

![Figure 1.1: Strategic and Tactical Tasks](image)

**Source:** Based on Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Free Press, 2004).
feeling completely overwhelmed by the amount of work always waiting for them.

David Allen, a noted author and consultant, does a great job in his articles and books describing the difference between a task and a project. He says, “Most people are inefficient because they don’t force themselves to decide what things mean and what they are actually going to do about them when they first show up. So they are constantly rethinking the same things over and over and not making any progress in doing so—only adding to their stress” (http://www.davidco.com/faq.php?detail=32&category=5#question32).

In truth, most people are responsible for more projects than they are even aware of. Think of some of the tasks that are currently on your to-do list. Chances are, if there is an undone item that has been on the list for a while, it’s really a project, not a task. Worksheet 1.1 offers a set of questions to help you decide if an activity is a task or a project.

Treating a project as a task prevents you from clearly defining the multiple steps and time commitment necessary to complete it. That creates the following problems:

- You avoid the task because you really haven’t figured out how to do it.
- You do small bits of the task but never get the momentum to see it all the way through.
- Your to-do list stays jammed with stuff you never get to, adding to your stress and making your list almost impossible to use.
- Every new task you get adds to your feeling that you’ve lost control.

Many people are struggling to balance a task list that’s really a project list. Take a minute and see if you can tell the difference. Which of these are projects and which are tasks?

- making cookies
- writing a status report
- coding a webpage
- drawing a blueprint
- cooking Thanksgiving dinner
- preparing a status meeting
- creating a website
- developing a new product.
Clearly, the tasks are on the left and the projects are on the right. But there also are many things we do that sit squarely in between—and that’s where we often lose our way.

What Is a Project?

The Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) is an internationally recognized standard setting forth the fundamental processes and best practices of project management. It describes a project in this way:

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to achieve a particular aim and to which project management can be applied, regardless of the project’s size, budget, or timeline. (www.pmi.org)
Let’s look more closely at the critical points in that definition:
- temporary endeavor: a project does not go on forever
- achieve a particular aim: a project must have a goal for completion
- size, budget, timeline: a project demands that you manage the need that’s driving the project—money, people, and deadlines.

Here are the critical differences between a project and other work that you do:
- A project has a definable beginning and a definable end.
- A project has cost, time, and quality goals for completion.
- A project requires the use of part-time resources that you may or may not have direct authority to use.

People often confuse a project and a process. The key difference between them is this: a project begins and ends; a process continues without a definable conclusion. Both comprise tasks, but the tasks of a process are repeatable—in other words, you follow roughly the same tasks every time you do the process. For example, when a project team develops a new suite of software to track customer contacts, they are working on a project—it starts and then ends when the software is installed. When the sales staff uses that software to manage its client base, they are using a process.

At the start of this step, you read about differentiating between a task and a project. Now let’s see if you grasp the differences between a project and a process. Put a checkmark beside the activities that are not projects:

- 1. Creating processes to ensure business compliance
- 2. Following processes to ensure business compliance
- 3. Planning and holding a company sales retreat
- 4. Following the project management standards
- 5. Devising a new training course
- 6. Teaching a new training course

Activities 2, 4, and 6 are not projects because they don’t end—you do them over and over again. They’re processes used to deal with things in a routine way—it’s ongoing work.
When a new project is started, you follow a project management process to see that all the steps needed to complete the project successfully happen, including tasks to plan, organize, and control. In Step 5 you’ll learn how to identify the various activities that a project requires.

Each project is unique. Each project has a set of tasks necessary to complete it successfully. Some of these tasks will be things that you do for all projects, including the 10 steps in this book. Some of these tasks will be specific to one project you’re managing. For example, a project to design a new website will include many tasks that aren’t included in a project to build an office building. A project intended to be done quickly will take shortcuts that a project intended to produce a high-quality end product will not. The basic 10 steps of this book, however, will be applicable to all of your projects.

Benefits of Project Management

A defined process for managing a project, like the 10 steps described in this book, increases

◆ repeatability of project success
◆ scalability of project work
◆ ability to manage complexity
◆ ability to react agilely to business change
◆ your clear focus on business results.

The trick is to follow a process that gives you enough structure to jump-start your project plan without adding too much overhead and expense. Companies new to the project perspective usually start with everyone doing his or her own thing with his or her project (also known as anarchy). Eventually, that approach breaks under the cost of redundant work across disconnected projects that can’t communicate with each other.

As their projects get more stressful, novice project managers often waste time by

◆ filling out forms they don’t understand
◆ hiding from or ignoring the customer’s perspective

Decide If You Have a Real Project to Manage
blindly following the tasks of the project without adapting to the changes the project has experienced
delivering late, poor-quality, or over-budget work.

Next, companies usually overcorrect with a strict, document-intense approach to project management. They add such extensive structure that project teams find themselves doing the project management deliverables and never getting to the actual project work. For example, if you spend all your time documenting the scope of the project, the risk mitigation plan, and the communications plan but never actually start building anything, you’re not focusing on the right things. When a project management approach is too complex, people lose track of the difference between doing project management to help streamline a successful project and doing project management because the boss said so.

The best place to be is in the middle of these two extremes—a comfortable and productive middle ground between hands-off and hands-tied. When done correctly, project management encourages more thinking up front to ensure more success at implementation. Nothing is done by a good project manager just because it’s “supposed to be.” Every step in a good project management approach has a clear purpose. This kind of approach encourages

- less rework
- better quality
- less cost to the business
- less chaos
- fewer heroics.

A good project management process, with flexibility and structure, ensures that your project will

- increase the bottom line by keeping the decision-making focus on the customer and building customer loyalty through project completion that is on time and within budget
- avoid costs by estimating rework through consistent management of deliverables and streamlining project success through lessons learned and evolving processes

Decide If You Have a Real Project to Manage
Roles of Project Management

Think about actors in a drama. Playing a role means inhabiting a part. There are specific behaviors, characteristics, and boundaries for each role. Likewise, in a project, there are specific roles to be taken and it’s important that everyone knows what she or he is responsible for producing or overseeing. Depending on the size and complexity of the project, one person may play one or several roles. In very large projects, one role may be played by several people. The only exception is the role of project manager. Research clearly shows that there should be only one project manager.

At this point, you’ve started to think about those tasks on your to-do list that probably are projects. Now you’re an unintended project manager with a list of projects rather than a task list, so what does that change? One of the most important changes is how you view yourself. Thinking of yourself as a manager of projects is different from thinking of yourself as a manager of tasks. In reality, you probably juggle both roles daily.

What does a project manager do? His or her primary responsibilities are to plan, organize, and control a project to its successful completion. To do this, the project manager

- figures out what work needs to be done
- finds and allocates the right resources to the right work
- manages the communication among all the people involved
- adjusts the plan when the project requirements change.

The project manager’s role includes managing the team. This requires leadership skills, including setting the team vision, assigning the best people to the tasks, coaching, and resolving conflict.

Although the role of project manager is a critical one, it sometimes can be misinterpreted as the most important role. The project manager may forget that he or she doesn’t own the project. The
business, represented by an executive funding the work, is the project's owner. The project manager is the steward of the project, essentially watching and guiding it.

Chances are you have become a project manager because you’ve been successful at the work you do. Many organizations promote to project managers those people who have shown great success getting tasks done. It’s most likely that some of the projects you manage will require you to act as project manager and the entire project team. When this happens, you’ll be tempted to neglect the strategic aspect of the project manager’s role and immerse yourself in the “doing” role of the project team. Resist that urge because both roles are vital to the success of any project. In Step 4 you’ll learn how much time to spend on project management activities by identifying and using the risk of a project to anticipate the amount of time demanded.

I like to describe this in a way that’s more relevant to my life: The project manager is the nanny, and the project (aka, the kids) belongs to the business (the parents). This differentiation matters because there is a big difference between the decisions a nanny makes regarding the children and the decisions that parents make for their children. In just the same way, important decisions about the business benefit of a project always should be made by the business, not the project manager. There will be more discussion on this later in the book, but you should know that it’s very common for the project manager to feel pressure to make these decisions without the necessary information.

The person (or people) who represents the business and writes the checks for the project is called the project sponsor. She or he establishes the business case and approves project adjustments.
works with the project manager to resolve conflicts between parts of the business. 

The project sponsor has requested the work so he clearly can define the business case for the investment. You may have a project on your list that you’re funding yourself, but in most cases the project sponsor is a senior leader in your organization. It’s possible to play the role of project sponsor and project manager, but that happens mostly in smaller organizations.

The sponsor owns the project—it’s her vision, her request, and her money. As the manager, you’ll handle the project, but it’s not your project. This is a critical point. Many managers lose their way because they start to think that the project belongs to them. They make choices that should be made by the sponsor. They begin to avoid communication with the sponsor—in fact, they believe the sponsor is a barrier to their ability to do the project well. If any of that occurs, the project will struggle. It’s very important for the manager to understand and accept the supporting nature of his or her role.

The project sponsor is an extremely important player, and if you don’t know who it is, stop the project until you find out. At that point you may make the unhappy and disruptive discovery that no one has figured out who the sponsor is. Realistically, it may not be within your authority or ability to solve this problem, but it is certainly a serious risk factor that you must take to the people who can solve the problem—an effort we know in business as “escalating.”

Sponsors tend to come from the executive ranks. The sponsor’s rank in the organization ensures that he or she will be very busy and difficult to approach, but as project manager you need a strong relationship with the sponsor from the beginning. Many sponsors don’t know what it means to be a sponsor so the manager has to help them understand the criticality of their role. Tool 1.1 shows tasks that the project manager can use to engage and keep the sponsor involved.

The other people who have vested interests in the project are called the stakeholders. These are people who, for one reason or
another, care what happens to the project. They may supply some project resources or they may receive output from the project. For example, the billing staff in a doctor’s office must be involved in rolling out HIPAA compliance. They may not be part of the project team designing the roll-out processes, but they have a vested interest.

By definition, the project sponsor is a stakeholder. So are the members of the project team and the manager. It’s important to have a clear understanding of who the stakeholders are and to communicate with them regularly throughout the project.

You’ll learn more about the project sponsor and stakeholders in Step 2, and you’ll learn to clarify the project scope with them in Step 3. In addition, you’ll learn how to determine the risk of the project based on the number of stakeholders and their priorities in Step 4—and that will help you build contingency plans before the project begins. In Step 8 you’ll learn to negotiate and manage the conflict that naturally occurs among stakeholders during a project.

TOOL 1.1

Tasks for Engaging and Maintaining Sponsorship

- Review the project business benefit
- Review the project goals
- Ask for and schedule in advance regular meetings with the sponsor to ensure the project is on track, according to the current business priorities
- Create a list of expectations with the sponsor to clarify both roles
- Clarify how handoffs between the manager and sponsor will occur
- Clarify when and how project issues will be brought to the sponsor
- Clarify how you hope the sponsor will communicate the status of the project to peers and to the company leadership
- Determine how the project sponsor will judge the completion of the project
- Determine how the sponsor will participate in the post-project review.
The project team comprises the people who are actively involved in the project tasks. Sometimes it’s difficult to determine whether a person is external to the project team or part of it, and it’s the project manager’s responsibility to decide this by the amount of time the person spends on project activities. Tool 1.2 lists some of the roles that may exist on a project team.

Another key role on the project team is that of project administrator. In larger projects it’s helpful to have a person who keeps track of all the project documentation, coordinates meetings, and monitors project task completion. This person reports to the project manager.

The heart of the project team is the group of individuals who do the work the project produces. They may be computer programmers, business analysts, training developers, or some other skilled practitioners. They too may forget that the part of the project they’re working on ultimately belongs to the sponsor—an understanding that the project manager must carefully encourage.

**TOOL 1.2**

**Potential Project Team Roles**

- Executive sponsor
- Project manager
- Project administrator
- Technical leader
- Quality assurance leader
- Business operations owner
- Business owner
- Architectural adviser
- Infrastructure adviser
- Finance leader
- Subject-matter expert

If you’re both manager and project team, don’t neglect the project manager role. Schedule a certain amount of time each week to think about the project and review your plan. If you don’t do this, you may find that you’ve completed lots of tasks that add little value to what your project has changed into while you weren’t watching.
In Step 5, you’ll learn to build collaboration between the team members and the stakeholders. In Step 6, you’ll assign project team members to tasks as you to build a project schedule.

The project manager’s role includes managing the team. This requires leadership skills, including setting the team vision, assigning the best people to the tasks, coaching, and resolving conflict.

A Model for Project Management: Dare to Properly Manage Resources

Figure 1.2 shows the Dare to Properly Manage Resources Model that you first read about in the introduction to this book. The first letter of each word in the name—DPMR—will help you remember the four main phases of project management that will be discussed in the 10 steps. Those phases are define, plan, manage, and review.

By definition, a project has a beginning and end, as shown in the figure. In between those poles, four significant things should occur:

1. Define: This phase explores why the project is being done—that is, why is money being invested in this project instead of something else? What is the business case? The way in which the project is done (set out in the project plan) depends on why it is being done.

2. Plan: The planning phase establishes how the project will be done to meet the business goals defined in the first phase. The outcome of the planning activities, the project plan, specifies the tasks to be done and the people assigned to each task. Essentially it is the project schedule.

3. Manage: In this phase the project plan is carried out, and the word to remember is adapt. This is a little confusing, because a lot of work has to be done defining and planning before the project plan can start. During this phase, the project manager may find that the business case from the defining phase or the project plan from the planning
phase is no longer adequate. As the project progresses, unexpected glitches will test the manager’s mettle. The arrows in figure 1.2 show you how Manage frequently tosses the project manager back into Define and Plan when it’s done correctly.

4. **Review:** When the project is finished, it’s not over. In this last phase of project management you learn from the project so that the next project goes even better. Although this phase often is skipped, it’s a critical activity.

You’ll learn more about the four phases of this project management model throughout the rest of the 10 steps.
Step 1 Checklist

- Determine which tasks on your to-do list are projects and treat them as such.
- Clarify the roles on your project team, including project manager, sponsor, and other stakeholders. Identify the people who will serve on your team.
- Help the project sponsor understand the role he or she will play on the project and how much time to reserve.
- Use the Dare Model as a checklist to ensure more thinking at the start of project and create more success at the end.

The Next Step

You have taken the first step—deciding if the activity you have at hand is a project. You’ve learned the basics of project management and clarified the roles. At this point, you’re ready to move to Step 2, where you’ll learn to clarify the business reason for the project—to prove your project is worth the time and effort that will be spent on it. That step is a critical prerequisite for creating your project plan.