1. KHancher: Keep it Simple and Communicate

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00:02 Speaker 1: From the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here's your host, Kendall Lott.

00:12 Kendall Lott: Project managers wanna know where they can use their skills now, and which skills are gonna be needed in the future. It's all about job security. We thought we'd get at this by asking someone who hires project managers, and has had a career of introducing project management into the Federal Government environment for over 30 years. Today's guest, Ms. Kimberly Hancher. She has focused on the field of information technology, its development, and even more its implementation in three federal organizations: The Department of Veterans Affairs, The Federal Communications Commission, and now as the Chief Information Officer at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. We had a conversation about how she's engaged with project managers over the last three decades, and which skills she sees as most important for project managers in the future. As IT has changed, have you seen project management change, and in what way? 'Cause we've seen IT really become a different animal now.

01:09 Kimberly Hancher: Right. Some of my observations are that successfully introducing automated tools and technologies into an enterprise has always been a challenge, and it still is. That has not changed. The project management disciplines, I think, are an important part of your toolset, because it brings an order, a way of chunking, a way of breaking down something that's quite big, into doable elements, and also getting all the right people involved.

01:45 KL: Now, is that something you were engaged with in the 80s and 90s? Were you engaged with that kind of principle?

01:47 KH: Yes, definitely.

01:49 KL: How has it changed as you've seen it coming right on up into this second decade here now in the 21st century?

01:56 KH: What has changed probably is that there are more of us who have been schooled in these disciplines. I think that there are lots of different approaches and levels of applying project management disciplines. And it's extremely important to choose one that's right for the organization. And so that's one of the things that I think has changed.

02:22 KL: So a proliferation of the ways, of decomposing and including all the stakeholders, right?

02:26 KH: Absolutely.

02:28 KL: Which ones are you most familiar with or most interested in that you're observing?

02:31 KH: Well, for most of the organizations that I've worked with, because the maturity, in terms

of just structured approaches was so low, that having really sophisticated project management disciplines was just a mismatch. So I've had to take the strong points of work breakdown structure, of clear role definitions in the task breakdown, building the work breakdown structure through integrated project teams, that sort of thing, to put it together for the organization. Not based on really the PMBOK, not everything in the PMBOK can be applied. And so it's really just taking the things that you need, the minimum that's needed, and applying that.

03:21 KL: I guess, there's two questions in there. To me, is on, what does that mean to say the maturity? And then how do you pick the right elements of project management to apply?

03:31 KH: Well, the very basic, so starting at that lowest common denominator, what I have identified is that you need a work breakdown structure. There has to be one on paper, not just in your head.

[chuckle]

03:44 KH: But it has to exist somewhere, either on a piece of paper, in a file. It doesn't matter whether it's Microsoft Project, a Spreadsheet, a Word table, but it has to exist. And then, the roles of the project sponsor, key.

04:01 KL: Do you see the application of project management to different kinds of problems than you have seen in the past? Or do you think that's gonna be very similar? How do you anticipate it being used in the future?

04:13 KH: Well I'll tell you, if I was the boss of the Federal Government let's say, what I would do is I would require all executives and program managers to have training in program management. Amazing. It is a discipline, it is a knowledge area. It is a domain that you can go to school for and learn about. But how many federal program managers and federal executives actually have that training? Very few.

04:48 KL: So you see it's need in the future there, flat out?

04:50 KH: I do. Let's say you're trying to transform your agency to be more customer service oriented. That is a call to action from this administration. And it's specifically with IT tools. We have a Presidential directive, to that effect. Well to do that, you have to carve-out projects. And if you don't have the training in how to do it, then you just spin for a long time.

05:21 KL: You see it being used as, transformational. It's a toolset for transformation?

05:25 KH: I really think it's critical to the success in doing that.

05:29 KL: Could project management be used in ways that are not about producing a product? Have you seen any parts of the discipline that you would use that way, or that you could see being used that way?

05:40 KH: Yeah, I do. I think that a lot of times, it is something that helps you take a strategic goal, or strategic direction, and then break it down into tactical plans and action plans. I really think that, enterprise architecture, is another area that should be very closely coupled with the strategic

planning process.

06:06 KL: Absolutely.

06:07 KH: So that you take the strategic goals, you figure out what are the business lines that we're gonna affect in this particular area. What are the underlying service components, the technology components, etcetera, etcetera. I don't see enterprise architecture as an IT thing.

06:26 KL: Right.

06:26 KH: I see it truly as a way for the organization to figure out how to operationalize some of the strategic goals. Make them happen.

06:36 KL: So where does the project management aspect kick into there, or the disciplines in underlying project management kick in to linking enterprise architecting with strategic planning? Where do you see that connection then?

06:47 KH: Well, one of the things that I like about project management is the focus on creating artifacts that are useful and in enterprise architecture, you have to be able to depict. I mean that's probably a lot of the value, is the models and the frameworks that come with that.

07:10 KL: Have you seen project management tools, or the project management discipline, parts of the discipline, misused?

07:16 KH: What I have experienced is a project; the rollout of laptops, nationwide.

07:25 KL: Sounds like a project so far.

07:27 KH: That focused so much on just meeting the milestones that were called out in the work breakdown structure and getting to the end. And didn't pause to recast the work breakdown structure, when there were serious problems and issues with the logistics of this effort. And so what I found was, I would get reports, "Yeah, we're on schedule." I'm actually not interested in the schedule. The laptops are not working That I need to understand [chuckle] why are they not working. How much of the field site, new laptops are not working, and how many are.

08:17 KL: It's a kind of thinking that was missing. The project manager couldn't think in that way easily enough.

08:21 KH: Yeah, I think that the project manager was schooled in time, money. And the thing about scope and results and requirements were not very high on her list.

08:36 KL: I see. We have to be careful with too much discipline [chuckle] and not enough integration or a big picture a little bit. In the end, it is about responsiveness to the stakeholders. Which you said at the top of the interview. Can you discuss a little bit about the role of communications in project management as you've seen it roll out, good, bad? How would you like to see it changed?

08:54 KH: One of the things that I really like to see in a work breakdown structure, is development

of a communications plan for the project. I really see that as critical, because there's so much miscommunication that happens. It's just astounding. I have learned for every project, I wanna know what's your plan for communicating to executives, across the IT community and then with end users.

09:23 KL: So way beyond just the people on the project team?

09:26 KH: Oh, yeah.

09:26 KL: This is so much more than that isn't it? Yeah, interesting.

[music]

09:33 KL: What do you see for the project manager of the future? What competencies are they gonna really need to highlight that you think would be the most helpful?

09:39 KH: What I think is gonna be really critical in the future is the human communications. It's just really, really important.

09:47 KL: About the need for communication, is it what we've learned in PMBOK in doing it better, or is it a different kind of communication, another skill we need to be talking about?

09:56 KH: The element that I would add to what's already covered in the PMBOK is probably marketing.

10:06 KL: Fascinating.

10:07 KH: I'm actually talking about, first of all, socializing and maybe a new idea. You start talking about it, getting them conversant with it, getting use to this idea. And so socializing something, is the first step of marketing. Then if you're really trying to get champions, you wanna select people who will talk about it, too. And socialize it even further. And address the concerns that people might have and try to mitigate that risk of resistance to change. Yeah. And so I think there's a certain amount of marketing materials. You need materials that help you and you need to know how to develop the message, the messaging.

10:55 KL: In summary, what I'm hearing, project management's an interesting discipline. Inside it has a number of key disciplines around being able to analytically, break work down to make complex things doable. And almost inherently, a project will produce something, through project management, that is going to cause some change. It's a change management opportunity and the knowledge of whose involved and who is impacted by it, it's about the stakeholders. You also talked about the sponsor as well as people on the team, knowing what to do. So that led us broadly to, in the future there is even more communications around marketing what we're up to. So project managers in the future, still a good job to take. Is there a future?

11:36 KH: Yes, yes absolutely.

11:37 KL: Okay. [chuckle]

11:38 KH: I definitely think it. I think it's a great future.

[music]

11:43 KL: Special thanks today for our guest, Ms. Kimberly Hancher. Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Post production performed at Empowered Strategies and technical an web support provided by Potomac Management Resources. I'm your host, Kendall Lott, and until next time, keep it in scope and get it done.