

12. 2014 Points of View

00:01 Kendall Lott: Hey, PM Point of View listeners. This is our end of year podcast, but I wanted to let you know that we'll be back in 2015, looking at project management again from all the angles, starting with an interesting discussion on the role of project management and creativity.

00:18 S?: Everything we do is a project in essence.

00:21 S?: We have the ability to be a one-size-fits-all application.

00:24 S?: Collaboration, and the ability to change, and the ability to not stay within a certain amount of confines is part of the way we define creative thinking, right?

00:33 S?: Right.

00:34 KL: It's been a fascinating year for me as CEO of the Washington DC Chapter of PMI. The PM Point of View podcasts have given me an opportunity to chat with some very interesting and diverse figures in the project management field.

00:45 S?: I wanna get nonprofits excited about project management, or excited about pro bono, because it can radically transform the way that they do their work.

00:56 S?: I really get frustrated with project managers when they blow off project management principles.

01:02 S?: The element that I would add to what's already covered in the PM-POV is probably marketing.

01:10 KL: From IT managers and executives at government agencies, to the theater, to a museum, a wedding planner, and even an author, we've covered a lot of ground from a lot of points of view.

01:21 S?: Agile is what you do when your back is up against the wall, naturally.

01:26 S?: And I sort of liken our team to something edible moving through the belly of a snake.

01:30 S?: We need to find a way to bring the quality profession and the tools into the project management world and vice versa.

01:38 S?: It's basically getting what they want, so that whenever they step in that room, they're saying, "This is what I wanted."

01:48 S?: There's absolutely nothing project managers do that isn't about people. It is a people profession.

01:55 S?: 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.

02:05 KL: For the year end podcast, I decided to get a sense of what this was all about, to put all the voices together. My takeaway from these discussions is that project management is alive and well, but to stay relevant, we must adapt to changing trends and environments, embracing change and even driving it.

02:23 S?: Project management is really, I think, critical to delivering almost any outcome.

02:28 S?: It's no longer that, "Oh, the architects and the engineers and the contractors, they need project management 'cause they build things." The business world is beginning to embrace and understand they need to think about their world in the construct of, "How do we get it done? How do we deliver projects?"

02:46 S?: If I was the boss of the federal government, what I would do is I would require all executives and program managers to have training in program management.

03:03 KL: So what makes a good Project Manager?

03:05 S?: Three core ingredients, we call it the talent triangle. One is technical acumen and technical ability, right? Invariably, a project or program, regardless of industry, is gonna have some technical aspect to it. That doesn't mean you need to be the IT programmer that can program in five different languages, that doesn't make you the Project Manager. But having that technical acumen to at least grasp the concepts. The second part is business management ability, not everything's gonna be a portfolio management approach, but there's always a business management aspect to it in terms of internal prioritization and resource alignment. And the last part's leadership.

03:35 S?: Definitely an excellent communicator. A great listener. Organization is key.

03:42 S?: Somebody that can think in the macro view and in the micro view. Not either/or, but to zoom in and out.

03:49 S?: Definitely have to be able to think quickly, and if something happens, you need to start thinking of alternative ways, or how this process is still gonna move without interrupting the flow.

04:05 KL: Kim Hancher, Chief Information Officer at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, used project management as a practical way to make the big changes that need to be made in government organizations today.

04:16 S?: 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.

04:38 KL: So this is the practical point of view of what we learn academically. That is, for PMs, people are the key and communication imperative.

04:47 S?: 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.

05:02 KL: For Bob Brese, former CIO at the Department of Energy, communication begins with common understanding.

05:08 S?: What is the outcome that is expected at the end of this? If you don't agree on the outcome and don't have a common understanding of what the project or what the activity is supposed to deliver, you can almost guarantee failure.

05:26 KL: There's no greater teacher than experience. Clearly the more seasoned project managers bring a valuable depth of understanding and richness to their role.

05:34 S?: If there's one thing that I think has helped me be moderately successful is the fact that I've had a lot of different jobs in a lot of different occupational areas, and so I bring those to an IT project. I ask questions around things I may have learned in physical security, or weapons, or facility operations.

06:00 KL: Wedding planner, Tara Melvin, owner of Perfect Planning and President of The Association of Wedding Planners, knows that in a practical sense, knowledge is power.

06:08 S?: With any planner, even though you know your field, I think you need to learn, not be the know-it-all of everybody else's profession, but know something of their profession, because they need to educate you so that you can be more knowledgeable in front of your client.

06:28 KL: As projects become the operating framework for doing business, project management is the ticket to advancement. John Cable, Executive Director of the Center for Excellence in Project Management at the University of Maryland, is one of the pioneers of project management as a field of graduate inquiry.

06:44 S?: I try to interview incoming masters students, and I say, "Why do you wanna study project management?" And here's the generic answer, "Well, sir, I'm a... Fill in the blank, mechanical engineer, fire protection engineer, whatever. And I've been out of school seven years, but I've begun to be given assignments where I have to manage other people. I'm going to be in a position where I have to manage projects. I don't know what I'm doing."

07:18 KL: Jordon Sims is the Director of Organization Relations and Programs for the Project Management Institute. His job is to demonstrate to business and government executives the proven value of project managers.

07:29 S?: If you're gonna be the head of a private sector Fortune 500 organization, for example, the traditional pedigree is that of an MBA.

07:36 KL: Right.

07:36 S?: However, those business programs are not by any means touching on the impact project and program management approaches can have, best practices, lessons learned, and core competencies.

07:50 S?: At one time, all managers came up sort of through the ranks, managers, project managers, executives, etcetera. And because of their interests, and predilections, and particular talents were given chances to step up, and step up, and step up. And that's a very valuable journey to have had as a manager, obviously.

08:13 KL: Deborah Vandergrift, former Production Manager at the Shakespeare Theatre, arrived at her position the old-fashioned way.

08:20 S?: A lot of these managers and executives got their training ad hoc in terms of the sort of higher functioning stuff. For example, I had one class in basic accounting, and now I manage a budget that represents half of this organization's expenses.

08:37 KL: Wow.

08:38 S?: As projects get larger and more complex, you need a project manager who has enough breadth of experience that he or she can account for a broader set of potential risks. In a small project, it's relatively simple and the risks probably aren't that critical to the success of the project, but as you get into larger and larger projects, not only on the dollar value but on the complexity or the significance to your mission, some of the risks aren't obvious, and they may not be direct risks, they're indirect risks, and there may be risks that have dependencies on each other. And so that requires someone with experience, and I think that goes to the whole concept of critical thinking.

09:24 KL: Oh, yeah, critical thinking. I heard a lot about that.

09:27 S?: Critical thinking means you are assessing and applying what needs to be applied when it's needed, right?

09:33 S?: So we're trying to teach critical thinking skills, understanding the framework, how do you think about it, how do you diagnose it, and then how do you be sure that you... In a project that unfolds over a multi-year period of time, the world changes, a lot of factors change. Are the critical assumptions that were made to launch this project still valid? Do we need to go back with the customer and do some mid-course corrections? So we're really focused on helping students learn how to approach it that way.

10:10 KL: So here's our brave new world. As we move into digital and virtual environments, the expectation of speed increases, and time becomes a rare commodity.

10:19 S?: Ultimately, when you have organizations that are compressing their time cycles and their time frames for projects and programs, what normally might have been for the tech sector two and three year projects for building multi-million, billion dollar data centers, heavy brick-and-mortar issues, they're going away from that. If they can't stand up and complete a project in 60 to 90 days, they're not gonna touch it, because they need to be faster, they need to be leaner, they need to be more agile with their practices.

10:43 KL: Did somebody say agile?

10:45 S?: Most often I hear people refer to agility when they want to be able to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to change.

10:53 KL: That's the co-owner of FoxHedge Ltd, Jim York. I had an enlightening discussion about Agile with him and Elizabeth McQueen of Customs and Border Protection.

11:02 S?: It's a process where you deliver quickly.

11:05 S?: And I think the corollary of that, and something that I know Jim has heard a thousand times, is we really very much embrace the notion of failing quickly. So that in fact if after a two-week period of time when our scrum teams have been developing something and then we show it to our stakeholders at our bi-weekly sprint review and demonstration, and someone is not pleased with something as simple as the verbiage on a button, we hear about that immediately from our user base, have the opportunity to address that within the next two-week period of time. It's a completely different paradigm than when you used to wait a year and a half, get the entire thing delivered, and only then discover that there are things you'd rather have tweaked.

11:47 S?: We're really putting into place a framework that allows an inspect and adapt cycle. We do some work, we inspect the results, we may make adaptations to improve both the work product and the process by which we are creating that product.

12:00 KL: It's almost like it's a high-speed evolutionary cycle.

12:03 S?: When you walk into an environment where teams are working in an agile fashion, there's a palpable buzz of energy in that room, because they're working together in a collaborative fashion, they are working on things that are meaningful, they get feedback when they are doing things that are appreciated, they get feedback when they are doing things that might have missed the mark.

12:24 KL: Ah, collaboration. As organizations move out of the silo structure and flatten, purposeful collaboration becomes more important than ever. These are skills that we need. At the Newseum, I found a degree of collaboration that I'd never witnessed before, and it seemed to be driven by their very organizational DNA.

12:42 S?: Project management is spot on in terms of what we do, but it's a team sport.

12:46 S?: It really truly is a leadership team, from development, PR and marketing, exhibits, broadcasts, technology. I mean we really do sit in a room and talk this stuff out.

13:00 KL: With increased collaboration comes a widening array of stakeholders and the need to manage them. Patty Rhule of the Newseum enumerated the many stakeholders that she collaborates with.

13:08 S?: We have a lot of stakeholders here.

13:09 KL: Right. That's what it sounds like. [chuckle]

13:11 S?: Yeah. We have a lot of stakeholders. Our partner, development wants the exhibit to be good, marketing wants this exhibit to be good so they can sell it, visitor services wants to be able to explain the exhibit to people who come by.

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13:23 KL: With stakeholders, guess what? They all start demanding quality. Jordon Sims makes an interesting point.

13:30 S?: We have digitally empowered customers, or taxpayers on the government side, as the end user for whatever your product and service is. One voice means a lot now in terms of what they can reach out to and do to a business.

13:43 S?: Quality runs deep, and deep in years. So you'll go through the flavors of the day, quality circles.

13:53 KL: That's Marcus Parker. Marcus sits on the board of the Baltimore Chapter of the American Society for Quality, ASQ, and is the President of the Silver Spring Chapter of the Project Management Institute.

14:03 KL: Project management quality, which one has the better, bigger more important value proposition to commercial enterprise?

14:13 S?: They're equal. I think professionals that have put themselves in a silo of excellence, whether it be quality management or just project management, in this environment, at this present time, are in danger of being downsized.

14:33 KL: The business community will start projectizing things more?

14:36 S?: Yes.

14:36 KL: Or seeing things in that lens, through that lens.

14:38 S?: I think they're gonna see it in that lens more than they are right now. I think they are also gonna understand that they have to create the environment within which projects can succeed.

14:50 KL: This cultural shift along with an increased volume of projects puts a premium on having effective project managers.

14:58 S?: The natural evolution that we're gonna see is, as our project managers get promoted and become those executives, then they're going to be much better as executives, understanding what the project teams need.

15:20 KL: The nonprofit world is now beginning to realize the benefits and wonders of project management. Max Skolnik of the Taproot Foundation is trying to bridge that gap by bringing project management techniques into the nonprofit sector.

15:33 S?: The problem is that nonprofits don't have a lot of experience with these tools, so when they set up projects or set up teams, they often set them up for failure. They have the wrong expectations, they have skewed timelines, they have poor sense of scope, they don't know what success looks like, they don't know how to measure success. So I think we need to create a series of encounters between these two worlds.

16:02 KL: And finally, Greg Balestrero, former CEO of the Project Management Institute and co-

author of "Organizational Survival: Profitable Strategies for a Sustainable Future" takes project management to the next level. According to him, it is the responsibility of project managers to ensure the stability of their organizations and ultimately the planet. He talks about moving from profitability to prosperity and the role of the project managers play in this shift.

16:28 S?: Can the organizational transformation have a positive effect on the planet and society, as well as will it contribute to their own survivability? The whole issue of ethics and values must be embraced by the Project Manager. If you're, in the simplest form of Project Manager, gathering and manipulating assets to create value for some consumer or some customer, then it's incumbent upon you to determine, "Is this a good thing to do?"

17:08 KL: Special thanks to this year's guests: Bob Brese, John Cable, Kim Hancher, Jordon Sims, Tara Melvin, Deborah Vandergrift, Jim York, Elizabeth McQueen, Scott Williams, Patty Rhule, Marcus Parker, Max Skolnik, and Greg Balestrero. Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission, post-production performed at M Powered Strategies, and technical and 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.