Top 10 Project Management Trends for 2012

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As the project environment grows in complexity, project management will require team, stakeholder, and executive collaboration in 2012 like never before. On-the-job application of training, custom-made project approaches, innovative project tools, and smarter resource management will be essential for driving the greatest business impact. Not only project management, but also the definition of “project success” has changed to encompass more than the triple constraint. Collaboration is a common theme throughout many of the 2012 top 10 trends for project management, which were determined by a global panel of ESI International senior executives and subject matter experts.

1. Program management will gain momentum, but resources remain in short supply.

Increasingly, large initiatives undertaken by corporations and government agencies are being recognized for what they are and aren’t: namely programs, not projects, which require a highly advanced set of skills supported by appropriate tools and methods to successfully execute. Yet many organizations struggle to find the right people and lack the management practices necessary to ensure success. In 2012, we will see more investments made in competency models, training, methodology development, tool use, and career pathing to ensure that professionals who carry the title 'program manager' are fit for the role.

2. Collaboration software solutions will become an essential business tool for project teams.

The proliferation of collaborative software in the project environment such as SharePoint® is going to intensify in 2012. Fueled by increasingly complex and virtual projects as well as tightened budgets, today's environment demands a more efficient way to manage communication and workflow. Collaboration is central to project management and having a site that allows project artifacts to be created, shared, and distributed within a repository that provides web-based access and critical functions such as automatic distribution and notification, version control, and user authentication greatly enhances productivity.

3. Learning transfer will become the new mantra, but with little structured application.

Learning transfer, the ability to apply training back on the job, will continue to be on the minds of PMO heads and learning and development (L&D) professionals who want their project managers to return from training ready to apply what they learned immediately and accurately to their projects. While L&D and business heads agree that sustained learning is a sound idea, very few organizations will invest in a formal process to make it happen. In 2012, we will see many organizations discussing the importance of learning transfer without really putting in place a structured approach to ensure it happens.

4. Agile blends with waterfall for a new "hybrid" approach.

Having moved from "manifesto to mainstream," Agile has confronted project teams with the difficulty of implementing the experimental and hyper-collaborative approach. To transition an organization into fully adopting certain aspects of Agile, project teams are combining traditional and Agile elements to create their own hybrid approach. In areas such as planning, requirements, and team communication, organizations are designing custom-made methodologies to do what works for them.

5. Smarter project investments will require a stronger marriage between project management and business process management (BPM).

In the financial services industry, and specifically in the insurance sector, there will be a continued laser-like focus on performing business processes as efficiently as possible to drive down operating costs. The philosophy of BPM is fast becoming a key factor in project selection. When new projects are proposed, their value will be judged to a large extent on the impact they will have on the organization's business processes. The more impact the project has on reducing internal costs, the higher it will be ranked. The "smart" money will be spent on driving costs out of the business. Given the high premium being placed on efficient processes delivered through projects, BPM is a key concept with which project managers will need to be intimately familiar.

6. Internal certifications in corporations and federal agencies will eclipse

the PMP®.

With roughly 470,000 Project Management Professional (PMP®) credentials having been awarded worldwide thus far, the PMP® remains the most popular and ubiquitous credential on the planet. However, it is not the prominent credential everywhere. In the U.S. government, as well as Fortune 500 corporations, a hierarchy of "internal" credentials has overshadowed the PMP® in terms of prominence. To be sure, the PMP® remains important, but it is now just one rung on the career ladder to get to the top.

7. More PMO heads will measure effectiveness on business results.

While introducing tools, using methodologies, mapping project management practices, sending project managers to training, and increasing the number of PMP®s in the organization are important metrics for a PMO head to collect and report on, they do not speak to the effectiveness of the PMO from a business perspective. To judge business effectiveness, PMO heads need to determine if their work has had a positive, quantifiable effect on the business in terms of troubled project reduction, lower project manager attrition, and faster time to market. In 2012, the practice of measuring the outputs, not the inputs, of project management will gain traction.

8. Good project managers will buck unemployment trends.

Even though unemployment is at record levels in many countries, good project managers are hard to find. Recruiting continues even in tough economies and organizations need individuals who can perform the basics flawlessly. The hunger for project management basics, in particular risk management, will continue to surge in 2012, especially in such countries as India and China where project manager attrition rates are disturbingly high and continuous training of new staff is critical.

9. Client-centric project management will outpace the "triple constraint."

For years, time, cost, and scope were the metrics upon which the success of all projects and their managers were judged. While the triple constraints remain important, they are no longer the be-all-and-end-all for project success. While risk and quality have also been cited as additional "constraints," the clear trend in 2012 is the value the project delivers to the organization. The new definition of project success is that a project can exceed its time and cost estimates so long as the client determines that it is successful by whatever criteria they use. In today's environment, project value is determined by the "recipient"—or client—not the "provider."

10. HR professionals will seek assessments to identify high-potential project managers.

Because project management is such an important function, human resources professionals will be tasked more intensely with identifying high-potential project

managers in 2012. The challenge HR professionals will face is that there is no 'silver bullet' assessment for identifying great project managers. Existing knowledge and skills assessments are of little use since they are not designed for entry-level project manager positions. Nonetheless, candidates must be measured not only on their technical abilities, but also on the all-important business and interpersonal skills. To the best of our knowledge, no one has yet developed such an assessment, but HR professionals will continue, and intensify, their assessment search this year.

"From the ascendancy of social media to the structured implementation of collaboration tools by the PMO and the steady rise of communities of practice, we are fast approaching a tipping point," said J. LeRoy Ward, PMP, PgMP, Executive Vice President, Product Strategy & Management, ESI International "Those project organizations that don't exploit such collaborative channels and technology will risk missing the most promising combination of force multipliers of the decade."

About ESI International

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