

# Information Overload

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## Welcome:

The beginning of any new year always seems to bring with it a flurry of activity. New projects are defined. Old ones are re-shuffled or shelved, and people slip back into the groove without too much of a struggle. 2007 has seen a couple of major events for IEA. First of all the offices underwent a major re-fit. We eventually found the computers under a layer of dust and then launched the biggest initiative IEA has seen in a while. OK, apart from last year when we ran our first conference. For those of you who don't yet know, IEA has been successful in gaining acceptance to provide traineeships in records management to the West Australian Local Government Sector. More information on this is provided in the "News from the Office" Section.

Whilst we may sound like we are forever blowing our own trumpet (by the way – we do have one !!) the reason we are able to do so much comes down to a few significant factors:

- We are not afraid to try new things (*We don't succeed every time, but we have fun trying*)
- The people who work at IEA are willing to have a go;
- We have become skilled in both time and project management. Which is the topic of the January ezine. It is no good having a darned good idea, if you have no idea how to get to the other end and put it into place and practice. What follows is a few of our suggestions as to what makes a project work (or not as the case may be). Whilst we have skirted this issues many times we have never sat down and given you our take on what project management is.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

**Lorraine Bradshaw**  
**Marketing Coordinator and Projects Officer**

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- What is project management?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- What resources do you need?
- Managing the process
- Notes from the office
- A Thought to ponder.

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## What is project management?

"Project management is the discipline of organizing and managing resources in such a way that these resources deliver all the work required to complete a project within defined scope, time, and cost constraints. A project is a temporary and one-time endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. This property of being a temporary and a one-time undertaking contrasts with processes, or operations, which are permanent or semi-permanent ongoing functional work to create the same product or service over and over again. The management of these two systems is often very different and requires varying technical skills and philosophy, hence requiring the development of project management." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project\\_management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_management)

## What are you trying to achieve?

*'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'*  
*'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.*  
*'I don't much care where--' said Alice.*  
*'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.*  
*'--so long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation.*  
*'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'*  
*Alice in Wonderland*

The most important factor to consider in the early stages of project management is to actually define the project. Many projects fail because of incomplete or incorrect project scoping. Why? The answer believe it or not is quite simple:

1. What business needs are you trying to address?
2. What are the benefits to the organisation?

Imagine building a house and failing to buy the right number of bricks or bags of cement, and when you realise you don't have enough you find out the brick manufacturer has gone out of business or changed its product line. Then the family moves in only to find you forgot to get the plumbers or electricians in.

Poor project scoping is caused by a number of factors:

- Too many people pulling in too many directions; (I want three stories/I want 2 and 7 bedrooms) because they have not defined the organisation's needs or the benefits this project will provide to the organisation.
- Lack of knowledge of what it is you want to achieve ie., where do you want to be at the end of it? Imagine not knowing where you wanted your new house to be, or what the new house would look like and then getting to the point of being able to move in, and saying "but that's not what I wanted". Would you be disappointed with the builder for building the house he/she wanted to build rather than the house you had a vague notion about?
- Lack of experience (I've never built a house before – do we need to ask the shire for approval before we start excavating for the cellar? Well I'm sure we can get permission afterwards if we need it!!).
- Lack of interest (But I'm happy with the house I've got, I don't have time to choose the bricks, tiles, lights....because the one I've got does all that anyway). They can't see the benefits – because of your lack of knowledge of benefits, you are unable to sell the new project. In fact it looks so much like the one they tried to implement last year and ...hey it is the same one they tried to implement last year. It didn't work then, it's not going to work now. Excuse me I've got some filing to do.

- Lack of time; (loosely linked to the point above. If you can't sell the benefits because you don't know what they are, people will not give you the time of day. Their other work will always take priority over something they do not like or do not want.).
- Not enough money in the budget. The three sides to a project are time, scope and money. A change in time will impact on the amount of money. A change in scope will impact both time and money. So it is essential to scope the project properly or add 50% to the money you've asked for.

## What resources do you need?

Before deciding on the resources that you need, you first need to decide if there is a solution already in the marketplace. Or are you going into unknown territory? The answer to this will determine the length of time, money, scoping etc that you will need to consider. Obviously if someone has been there and done that, you stand a much better chance of succeeding with your own project – on time and on budget, than if you are charting unknown territory.

### Personal time

The first thing you need to allocate is your own time. This is used to define the project, conduct market research; site visits and interview key stakeholders about what is not currently working within your organisation. If you lack experience and/or knowledge in these initial areas, you will also need to assign additional money to bring in people who can help you obtain these answers. These can be from within your own organisation (co-opting from within can save time and money as they also have a good understanding of what is not currently working). However, it should also be noted, that not everyone can lead a project, and not everyone has the same subject experience that you have, and as we have also mentioned, they may also have their own ideas about where they want the project to go.

External assistance (for example consultants) can shorten the process somewhat. Consultants should be product neutral, and should make their recommendations on the best solution to your problem, and not one that is based on how big their commission will be. So before hiring you may like to consider asking whether or not they are affiliated with any particular company before going ahead.

Whilst software firms can be asked to demonstrate their product driven solution to you, this should be done after you have determined that you do actually need a new piece of software. It is also true to say that some problems can only be fixed with a change of mindset of personnel or the personnel themselves rather than throwing another software band-aid solution at the "problem".

### Time

When allocating your time to the project, it is also important to determine how many people you will need to be part of your project team. If you have too many people on the team you may struggle to organise meetings that fit in with everyone's schedules. Too many people who fail to turn up because they cannot see the benefit of the project will see project overruns occur.

### Money

Which brings me to money. How much have you asked for? If your project is software driven have you considered how many licences/seats you will need to purchase as well as the initial software itself? Do you have money in the budget to cope with purchasing upgrades or is this part of the package you have managed to negotiate?

Have you allocated money for trainers? How much? Bear in mind that most people will need about a day of hands-on training for a completely new system, plus follow up work based on brain fade, and the time difference between training and implementation of the system, and you will have some idea of how long you will need to employ a trainer for. Is this cost in your budget?

Have you allocated money for outside assistance? Therapists notwithstanding, if you are implementing a brand new, never before seen solution to a particular problem then you will also need to put money aside for code writers, designers and people to amend the code once you have discovered that you forgot a section in the original scope.

And any other consultants that you need to draw upon if your own experience is lacking somewhat.

### **Personnel**

As we have mentioned, people resources can make or break a project. It is wise to obtain the help of people who believe in you and what you are doing. No I am not talking about your mother or your therapist, but key stakeholders or drivers. People who are enthusiastic and want to see the benefit to the organisation. These people can be senior management; after all they are the ones with their hands on the purse strings. But need not necessarily be. Some of the best people to get on side are those people who will be directly affected by the changes.

There are of course people who will be directly affected by the process who do not want to "play" – but we'll talk more about those people in a moment.

### **Software/Hardware and Peripheral requirements**

Let's assume that you have been given some money, you even have the support of the people who will be using it. The next thing to consider is the hardware that will be running the new system. It is no good having the latest whiz bang piece of software if your Commodore 64 cannot recognise it, let alone run it. So it is important to have in mind that you may also need to upgrade the hardware as well as the software (if you are implementing a software solution). But what about the peripherals? Barcode scanners, file covers, labels, new shelving, racking, new building, technical assistance to move offices, people and associated plants and 'puters.

As we mentioned earlier, each one of these items will need to be allocated time and money in the project scope phase. Failure to do can see the solution die before getting to project completion.

## **Managing the process**

As with all things, change management is a vital part of any project and needs to be handled with extreme care if you are to succeed with any major initiative.

As we mentioned in the last edition, if management has tried many times to implement changes and major systems upgrades without the support of the people using the system, and it didn't do what they were told it was going to do, then they are going to be wary of using it.

So, before throwing more money and technology at a problem, it is worth finding out if the last system really was not used because it was poorly scoped, poorly chosen, or whether it was the attitude of the people who were supposed to be using it!

If you find staff by-passing the processes and procedures because they don't trust it, don't like it, or it doesn't seem to do what the old system did, or wasn't as good as the system they used at their last place of work, then you have got some serious problems that need addressing.

Which brings us to the final points about people management. People do not like change for change sake. If they can see a benefit they may accept it, but if it takes them outside of their comfort zone you have to be prepared for the fact that people will always try and by-pass something so they don't have to change the way they do their work. After all "we've always done it this way, so why do we need to change again?"

Making sure they have all the information they need (marketing not just sales hype) to make an informed decision; Proper training; Hardware and peripherals needed to do their jobs and you may just get the right people on board at the right time.

However, there is another group of people we haven't spoken about yet. Whilst these people may not be directly affected by the project, they may be indirectly affected by the attitude of the people who are. These include – family members (well if you don't want to go to work today, then don't; Look I've found this perfect job for you etc etc); Clients and Customers. Clients and customers need to know you are undergoing training in a new system etc, so they will perhaps be more understanding to the fact that you may not be as fast to respond to their inquiry as normal. Again – communication is the key to keeping these people on side.

### **Time management**

Make sure that people do what they say, when they say they are going to do it by. Failure to manage this can cause delays down the track. Hold people accountable. Blowouts in time are some of the biggest causes of cost overruns. The other is of course not scoping the project properly in the first place. But I'm sure you will have gathered that by now.

As always this is a very brief overview of the subject. But we hope it has given you food for thought.

## Notes from the Office:

### **Press Release: Records Management Traineeships Aimed At Local Government Now A Reality!**

Shirley R Cowcher, Director of Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd (IEA), a niche consulting, training and recruitment company which specialises in records and library management, announced today that the company had received approval from the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Support Network (ATSN) of the Department of Education and Training to employ up to five records management trainees and host them with local government clients.

IEA has been acutely aware for some time that there is a current skills shortage in the records management industry and with the ongoing demand for skilled personnel, the company has been endeavoring to establish a programme which will encourage people to gain skills in this field and at the same time assist many of their clients.

The ATSN approval for this new initiative will see IEA's Learning and Development Team working together with local government clients and supporting government agencies to provide a 12 month programme in which successful applicants will complete a Certificate III in Business (Recordkeeping) and gain valuable hands on experience.

"IEA is very eager to launch the traineeship and we hope to have our first trainee in place with a host client by April 2007. Initial planning is already underway with Central TAFE and IEA and we will soon be in a position to recruit potential trainees." stated Ms Cowcher.

## A Thought to Ponder:

**"Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely"**

Karen Kaiser Clark, b 1938  
American legislator and feminist

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au). Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to [training@iea.com.au](mailto:training@iea.com.au) with "subscribe newsletter" in the subject line.

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