When Project Management Is Wrong For Your Project

By Janet Kuhn

One new office, two new offices, three new offices, more... If planning for major, repetitive projects at your organization sounds like the childhood game, "Hot Potato," maybe formal Project Management is just what you don't need...

The company where I previously worked embarked upon a major building and acquisition program, adding new medical clinics at an average rate of one a week.

When we began this aggressive program, we treated each new clinic like a project. And, indeed, it was a project as we assessed the impact on our existing configurations and placed orders with our many network, hardware, and application suppliers.

However, there were not enough project managers in the world to continue to treat the addition of each new clinic as a standalone project!

Then I realized that what we were doing was actually an ITIL Standard Change wrapped around a Change Model. The Standard Change was to provision IT services for a new clinic, and the Change Model was a standard portfolio of IT services for a new clinic.

Based on my own experience as a Project manager working in IT, following I describe how I scrapped formal project management and used ITIL Standard Changes and Change Models instead – with dramatic improvements in efficiency and quality at the same time.

Standard Changes and Change Models

ITIL introduces Standard Changes and Change Models. It defines a Standard Change as a change that is done frequently and follows an established path. As such, it does not follow the full Change Management process, thus consuming fewer resources and streamlining the delivery of the Change.

The ITIL states the requirements for a Standard Change as follows:

- the tasks are well-known and proven
- authority is effectively given in advance
- the train of events can usually be initiated by the Service Desk
- budgetary approval will typically be preordained or within the control of the Change requester.

A Change Model refers to a process model that identifies the impact of a change. Typically constructed with the assistance of the Capacity Management Process, Change Models can run the gamut from small (e.g., a new workgroup printer) to large and complex (e.g., a complex or large infrastructure change).

One of the prime attributes of a Change Model is the identification of the size, or scope, of a change, thereby streamlining yet another portion of the Change Management process.

Change Management maintains control over Standard Changes by requiring that monthly status reports document the number and type of Standard Changes carried out that month.

When a Project Isn't Really a Project

To establish IT services for a new clinic required that we provision wide area network circuits and local network equipment, configure network equipment in our home office, wire the local area network, order desktop workstations and printers, purchase software licenses, configure application servers and databases, and conduct user training – virtually continuously.

In this situation, how would you measure improvement in the efficiency of your Change Management Process?

Efficiency is very much a quantitative measurement, measuring the volume of resources or funds committed to making a change, as well as measuring the time required to make a change.

The adoption of a formal Change Management process as documented in the OGC Service Support book puts a powerful tool at the command of the IT department. In its quest to meet the dual objectives of benefiting the organization by introducing change and the protection of the live infrastructure, it allows the mature IT operation to transform itself into a Change machine.

In other words, Change becomes the business of IT.

However, this transformation does not come without a cost. Coincident with change and bringing change in the infrastructure under control comes more formality and documented policies and procedures. Yes, unfettered Change Management can become – bureaucratic! And bureaucracy, even though it provides much control, can ultimately lead to inefficiency and higher costs.

An efficient Change Management process weds Standard Changes and Change Models together to create a path through the Change Management process that swiftly identifies the impact of a proposed change and allows work teams to initiate and execute the pre-defined Change steps.

Summary

Although the New Clinic Change Model was very complex, it worked extremely well and cut provisioning time and resources dramatically. I believe this was due to three reasons:

- the initial Change Management process provided a collaborative environment in which all of the IT groups, the business, and outside suppliers participated and came to understand each other's processes and concerns
- the initial projects were well documented, and the documentation could be easily converted into tasks and procedures for establishing new clinics
- extensive reporting gave everyone a quick bird's eye view of the status of the clinic provisioning, as well as historical record of what we had accomplished in such a short period of time

The bottom line is the ability to undertake a high rate of change, streamline resource and time requirements, while maintaining an accurate and effective Change Management process.