Advantage Consulting, LLC

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Project and Program engagements fail because client leadership is removed from the 3 most common PCIs (Pre-Crisis Indicators)

A leading international financial services institution launched new risk management software – prematurely. After being active for just 30 days, it required over 90 major enhancements and customizations. With billions of dollars at risk, the IT department was under extreme scrutiny and pressure.

Because the software was already live, and disastrous mistakes had already occurred, tensions at the firm were at a dysfunctional high. Day to day global business being conducted with this broken and in crisis application was not an option. Worldwide financial implications loomed on the horizon which would be an international, fatal blow to the firm.

*IT and the business units had their backs against the wall, struggling to understand how these enhancements would be prioritized and executed differently – and quickly. The time had come to **STOP** the insanity and **GET IN FRONT** of the core problem.*

Pre-Crisis Indicator #1 – Project intention not properly defined

*The painstaking process of capturing the business vision from leadership is so daunting we often just "fast-forward" to what we **THINK** it is rather than take the time necessary to capture an array of abstracts and then document into concrete objectives. The intention of leadership for the risk management software far surpassed what the software was capable of doing and better suited to a more boutique organization versus a global leader in financial services. If leadership had been taken through a more rigorous investigation of the software's capabilities, their vision would have been realized for the implementation because they would have known the limits and capabilities of what was purchased. They did not understand why they needed to do this analysis to get the results they desired.*

Pre-Crisis Indicator #2 – Scope Creep and Scope Change not managed

Professional business process and system analysts are a tough commodity to attract and retain. These resources are pivotal to the success of any project because they are the architects of intention, objectives, and plans. They are typically, at a principal level, with the project leader, responsible for the execution and cadence of requirements being communicated efficiently and effectively to IT. If this does not happen successfully, projects are doomed to sure failure. So, what does this have to do with scope creep and scope change? The software required 90 major enhancements and customizations because the business process and systems analysts were diametrically opposed to what needed to be built, thereby having a direct impact on the scope. The systems analysts are the architects of what will be built. They are on the front line with the stakeholders defining the details of the result. This happened because the third pre-crisis indicator was never assessed.

Pre-Crisis Indicator #3 – Project stakeholders and leadership insufficiently engaged

When the project leader consultant is brought into the initiative late in the game, getting the project stakeholders and leadership to commit critical up-front time to a project is often impossible because the person made responsible for this is typically not a peer or a supervisor of these resources. Project stakeholders and leadership are many times insufficiently engaged because the project intention does not define a high value impact, therefore their reaction is to disengage from something "not worth their time". Attracting and retaining a project leader who has best in class emotional intelligence is critical for successful communication with stakeholders and leadership. The project leader needs to direct the client towards a higher level of ownership and responsibility. If your client leadership is unwilling or incapable of providing the quality time necessary for a successful engagement, this needs to be identified immediately. The seasoned project leader consultant will always make this a priority.

The good news is you can proactively guarantee this doesn't happen.

Are you ready to deliver and exceed stakeholder and leadership expectations?

Realistically, it might not always be possible to do this but if managing project activity versus the project team becomes the focus, then the probability of exceeding stakeholder and leadership expectations becomes common. There are five key points to keep in mind:

1. *Project teams are staffed with subject matter experts within the required disciplines necessary to the project; ALLOW them to be the experts; they do not require management; they require leadership.*
2. *Identify project activity with laser focus; what do we need to do in order to maximize our effectiveness towards a best practice outcome which will be easily maintained in a continuous improvement state?*

3. *Practically and tactically craft your project plan; this requires a project leader with focus, creativity, realism and compassion.*
4. *The highest level of emotional intelligence is required to obtain every single activity necessary, what it takes to perform the activity, and especially what impact it has on the resources performing the activity.*
5. *Establish a communication plan that continuously engages stakeholders and leadership; high emotionally intelligent project management resources understand that communication plans value stakeholder and leadership time commitments and highlight their input as invaluable to the project's success.*

If you believe this approach could work for your projects, programs, and organization's culture, then let's discuss it.

The approached I used in this extreme situation can help you to **STOP** crisis and **GET IN FRONT** of your core project issues; it can even be used so that you are immediately IN FRONT of any risks and impediments facing large scale, cross-functional initiatives. Your probability of success to meet and exceed expectations for your initiatives will be realized.

But to be honest, this is an approach that works if there is full commitment to the process. There are many intangible skills to a successfully run project that cannot be "taught" in the traditional sense. Focus, creativity, realism, and above all else, compassion are critical success factors; these attributes in a project leader are rarely looked for in the hiring process. Running a project "by the book" quashes all the empowerment that the result of the project intends to provide; it's the easy thing to do but it rarely is the right thing to do.

Last thing …

Since 1997, I proactively circumvented leadership from being blindsided with "at-risk" or "off-schedule" project status by teaching them to identify the three most common PCIs: (Pre-Crisis Indicators):

1. Project intention not defined properly
2. Scope creep and scope change not managed and
3. Project stakeholders and leadership insufficiently engaged

Advantage Consulting, LLC clients have achieved stellar results:

- ✓ *Reporting reduced from 4 days to 4 hours, saving $1.4M*
- ✓ *130,000 records migrated in 60 days, $72M opportunity*
- ✓ *Incomplete for 3 years, 80 processes converged in 13 months*
- ✓ *Disaster averted - risk management software defects resolved in just 10 months*

I look forward to working with you and your organization on your next project or program.

Who is Donna Chiacchia?

Photography by Daniel Gagnon   www.danielgagnonphoto.com

Hi, I am Donna Chiacchia, founder of Advantage Consulting, specializing in Project and Program Leadership. I work with Financial Services, Bio-Med/Pharma, and Corporate Training leadership that have processes, projects and programs in crisis, and restores them to a continuous improvement state.

Want to learn more? Contact me on my website www.consultdonna.com and schedule a call.

P.S. When I am not pursuing my project and program leadership passion, I spend my time traveling with my husband, enjoying friends, and lavishing lots of attention on my two daughters (blond tabby kitties) Elizabeth and Henrietta.