green project management

Consider Green Project Management on your Projects

The world is going green and it appears that the United States is starting to get the message as well. We are collectively realizing that we do not have an unlimited amount of air or water or space to continue to utilize resources as we have done in the past. The pending concern over global warming merely serves as the central rallying point for an environmentally friendly movement that has been underway since at least the 1970s.

How can we apply these "green" concepts to our project management discipline? One obvious way is that we can manage green projects more efficiently. For example, if you are the project manager on a project that will result in a using less packaging in your products, it would be good if your project completed on time. The sooner that project ends, the sooner the green benefits will be achieved.

On the other hand, most project managers do not run these kinds of projects. Most of us deal with projects such as installing a new software package or upgrading network infrastructure. How can these projects become more environmentally friendly?

The answer is Green Project Management (GreenPM).

Green project management is a model where we think green throughout our project and make decisions that take into account the impact on the environment – if any. It is a way to ingrain "greenthink" into every project management process. Here are two examples using the Project Charter and issues management.

Project Charter

I have seen many Project Charters using many templates. However, I have never seen a charter with a section on environmental concerns. Therefore, I am sure that most project managers never give it a thought as they are defining the project. I am also sure that few project sponsors give it a thought either.

But perhaps there are ways that your project can be greener is you would only think about it. For instance, if you are upgrading your network infrastructure, it is likely that some of your equipment will be obsolete. If you do the same thing I did 10 years ago, you might take the old equipment and bury it in the middle of a big dumpster. However, maybe the better choice is to seek out a recycling company. You know what – it might even cost you a few bucks. However, if you identify the recycling need up-front you can build the cost into your estimate.

Issues Management

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You know the process - identify an issue, determine the cause, estimate the impact to your project, look for alternatives, make recommendations, etc. Now let me add a section to your Issues Resolution template to identify environmental impacts. I am not saying that every alternative will have any impact one way or the other. I am just saying to apply "greenthink" to the process.

For example, let's say that you have an issue that will require an additional six hours of user testing to resolve. One option would be for the testers to work in the evening to complete the work with the least disruption to the schedule. Of course, you want to understand the impact of this evening testing such as poor morale and overtime pay.

If you had a section on your form for the environmental impact, you might also include the energy required to run air conditioning (or heat), lighting, water, etc. I know many of you are saying this is crazy because the costs are so low. However, it is not the costs we are worried about. It is the impact on the environment of using the extra electrical, natural gas, water, etc. I also know the impact is small, but consider that you are making these decisions along with millions of other people also making similar decisions. It could all add up. In fact, I taught a class in an Eastern European country last year where they might choose to delay the project for a day rather than use these additional natural resources. It's not always such a stretch.

The point about green project management is <u>not</u> that we make every decision in favor of the one that is most environmentally friendly. The point is that we start to take the environment into account instead of ignoring it. You might make most decisions the same as you do today. But there might be some decisions you would make differently. These different decisions, multiplied by tens of thousands each day across the world, can make a difference.

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