Re-planning for Success

As with all bodies of work, if you want a different output from your efforts then either the inputs need to change and/or the method of doing what you do needs to change. With the previous project failure in mind, what are we going to do differently this time and how will it be done to avoid a recurrence of the same issue or issues? The lessons learned from the previous stage of the project should be a key input in to the re-planning phase.

It is not unknown at this stage to have a change of personnel on a project. This is a great opportunity to re-assert the project goals and objectives. This is in every sense a second bite at the cherry. New project members can help to refresh the project approach and introduce a strong team spirit.

When re-planning, plan for early success. i.e. design the plan to almost guarantee that the first couple of deliverables or milestones will be completed on time. This has some important advantages:

1. Early success gives confidence to the team that they can deliver continuously until the project is complete.

2. Early success gives confidence to the stakeholders that you are on the right track the project will be a success when compared to the previous failure.

3. This can help to build momentum on the project so that the team get into the "habit" of constantly delivering.

What needs to be prioritized in order to make a good start and put some points on the board early in terms of delivery. This is a very important point. If you and the project team make a strong start, you are halfway there.

The What and the How

This what we refer to as the "What" and the "How". The "what" is what actually gets delivered. What are you doing?

The "How" refers to the method of delivery.

When you look back at all the tasks that were planned and executed, when they were done, how they were done and by whom, what would you change?

Were all the milestones realistic?

What is needed to be done and in what order to achieve each milestone?

What resources are needed?

Do you have all the information available that will enable you to plan adequately?

These questions can only be answered by running a detailed workshop with all of the relevant subject matter experts, project team and sponsors to get the level of detail required.

From this workshop you need to build a detailed plan and everyone must buy into this plan. The plan is not owned by the project manager exclusively. Everyone needs to own the plan.

Has the new plan been adequately reviewed both individually and as a group. Project plans can contain hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of interdependent tasks. It is not unusual to miss one of these vital links. This stage is all about detail detail detail!.

Once the plan has been put in place, what are the big milestones upon which the team can focus?

So at this stage you have a plan, you have resources and you have rearranged the team to suit the challenge. Are the project sponsors in place? Are they engaged? Is everyone clear on what went wrong in the first place and what we are going to do differently?

Can all the team members clearly and concisely state their role in the project and what the next big milestone is?

You should set things up so that any member of the team can give a project update at a few minutes notice.

It is not unknown that project teams can be scattered across different locations. This can bring its own challenges to the table but a concerted effort needs to be made to keep communication clear, frequent and informal. Much cohesion and information can be lost by not ensuring a culture of good communication on the project.

Now that the milestones are understood, how to we track them. We do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past by not having early warning signs to indicate problems early enough.