What is a Project?

BY: Collin Quiring

For people that view "Project Management" to be a strict discipline used only in formal settings or for those that regard "Projects" as a "thing that companies do" I submit that projects are all around us and that we need to have a larger viewpoint. The official definition of a "Project" in the Fourth Edition of the PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) is: "A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result."

This means that you could define a project as simply as the process for getting up in the morning and getting to work. All the elements of a project are there – you have a goal (result) that you want to achieve. And, there are items that must be completed to get that done – from waking up to arriving at your destination. There are a number of choices about tasks that can be made and the order of which you can determine.

You probably do not have a formal, documented process for the activities to accomplish the goal of getting to work. This just demonstrates that the level of documentation and formal processes should be in accordance with the level of the project. It is unrealistic to expect a Scope statement, Project Charter and task update process for a personal project such as this. And, the amount of Project Management that is required should also be in accordance with the level of the project.

I think that we too often concentrate on the *product* part of the definition – thinking about a project as the work that goes into making something tangible. And, these are the easiest types of projects to notice – we can see the physical results. However, I think that we need to view the *result* part of the definition. These are the types of projects that we tend to omit.

What we often do is look at the parts of a project that are product oriented and view that as the entire project. (Yes, there is Portfolio Management which deals with this but I am only talking about how to view a project.) A great example of a result-oriented project is in an article that I ran across this morning about the military in Iraq. Their project is looking to achieve a result of being able to "positively affect many contracts with Iraqi civilians in essential services" and to "deny the enemy places of blight and places of hopelessness". Those goals are result specific and result in numerous tangible products and services but the overall project is to achieve a non-tangible result – what we might generically call "a better Iraq". To achieve this result, they are working on the appropriate pieces of established Project Management that will best help their needs.

A project isn't just a corporate based tangible product – it can be a goal.

The article I am referring to:
2nd HBCT PAO, 1st Inf. Div., MND-B
BAGHDAD - Multi-National Division - Baghdad leaders from the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, and supporting elements attended a class about the importance of project management at Camp Liberty.

The daylong course emphasized how the improved security in Baghdad can positively affect many contracts with Iraqi civilians in essential services.

"Services like sewer and electrical problems, medical clinic issues and emergency problems with schools are areas where we really need to make a lasting impact on the population to turn things around and improve quality of life," said Maj. Andrew Attar, Joint Project Management Office, 2nd HBCT. "We want to deny the enemy places of blight and places of hopelessness where they can recruit members."

Project management offices in the brigade focus on contracting jobs out to take care of the needed projects, stemmed from an agenda from Col. Joseph Martin, commander, 2HBCT, named the Commander's Emergency Response Program.

The program is designed to establish community improvement projects with the local governance and the Iraqi Security Forces in northwest Baghdad.

"We help to try to turn around these neighborhoods through these projects; to give people hope in the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi Security Forces," Attar said. "We want to make sure we are achieving the desired effects that our commanders need through these projects and becoming better project managers."

In order to improve the process of project management, Attar added that the class was crucial for development in the brigade.
To give insight to the attendees, finance and civil military operations members from the 4th Infantry Division and the 926th Engineer Brigade also attended the class.

"We're looking at the intermediate to the advance levels of project management; most of these guys have already gone through the basic training," Attar said. "So what we are looking at here is sharing the lessons learned across the brigade and getting ourselves to that next level of excellence in terms of how we do projects across Baghdad."

The class participants spoke about project operations, such as file management, how to write scopes of work and bills of quantity in contracting, how to do quality assurance and quality checks on projects, how to deal with contractors, the biding process of contracting and how to pay contractors.

"What we've learned so far is the process, we go through in project management and the paperwork we have to go through," said 1st Lt. Fidencio Gamorano, 926th Eng. Bde. "I'm starting to learn a little bit more as far as how everything is set up so we can get on the right track."

Gamorano added that partnering with the Iraqi government and ISF to reach out to the people of Iraq is very important for project management.

"We get to give something back to the Iraqi people," he said. "A lot of these people want to work, and this is the best way so we can all learn from each other and work

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