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Kevin Stoker

Franklin University, kevin.stoker@franklin.edu

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Life is Like a Box of...Projects

May 30, 2017 | By Kevin Stoker
Project Management

I recently found myself watching *Forrest Gump* on a rainy Saturday afternoon. I have seen this movie probably 10 times and I always struggle with Forrest's famous quote "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." I always tell Forrest to just look at the paper insert in the box that identifies what is contained in each chocolate...but he never listens. The chocolate maker had already recognized this potential risk in making assorted chocolates and put a plan in place to mitigate that risk. This is the value of project management—and we all use some version of project management in our everyday lives.

The Project Management Institute (PMI) is a professional organization that has developed project management principles that are largely considered the gold standard in the industry. We follow these principles within The Institute (at Franklin University) to accomplish our design goals, and you likely follow them in your personal life as well. You may just not be aware of it.

PMI has identified five process groups (or phases) that occur within every successful project:

- Initiating
- Planning
- Executing
- Monitoring and Controlling
- Closing

Each one of us completes several projects each day using these process groups. When you wake up every morning you likely have a normal routine throughout the day: brush your teeth, make breakfast, get the kids dressed, take the kids to school, do laundry, read a few chapters of a new book, etc.

Let's use laundry as an example of a project that you complete on a daily basis (or at least multiple times a week):

- Initiating - Initiate the laundry “project” by setting aside time to complete it because it has been determined that clean clothes are a priority.
- Planning - Spend time planning how the laundry will get done.
 - Determine who is on the laundry team (kids, spouse, etc.)
 - Define each person’s role
 - Meet with team to make sure everyone understands what needs to be done
 - Estimate time to complete laundry
 - Identify potential risks (make sure little Johnny didn’t leave gum in the pocket of his dirty jeans, etc.)
- Executing - Doing the laundry
 - Separate the clothes into different piles
 - Put the first load in the washer
 - Add detergent
 - Start the washer
 - Put clothes in dryer once the washer is complete
 - Start the dryer
 - Fold/hang clothes once dryer is complete
 - Repeat process until all clothes are clean
- Monitoring & Controlling - Verifying the laundry is being done correctly and under the guidelines specified in the planning phase
- Closing - The laundry is completed. Determine what went well and what needs to be improved for next time.

Obviously, we don’t consciously follow a formal project management methodology when doing laundry, brushing our teeth, or taking the kids to soccer practice. But we all have some basic project management skills to help us get through the day. **We are the project manager of our own lives.**

PMI defines a project as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. It has a definite beginning and an end. Projects can last 10 minutes or 10 years. By adopting and utilizing this project management methodology, we are more likely to have a successful project and a repeatable process whether it’s doing laundry, designing a course, or designing a box of assorted chocolates. When done appropriately, project management can save a great deal of time and money...and leave more time for eating boxes of chocolate.

References

- Project Management Institute (2017). *Guide to the project management body of knowledge*. S.I.: Project Management Institute.
- Lewis, B. (2006). *Bare bones project management: What you can’t not do*. Eden Prairie, MN: IS Survivor Pub.

About the Author

Kevin Stoker

Kevin Stoker provides project management and governance of all course design within the Institute while also managing its overall project portfolio. Kevin has served Franklin University since 2006