

Methodology – It’s Not a Bunch of Malarkey. Project Management

Hi, I’m Paul Malarkey, a project manager here at the Toy Barn, the 8th largest toy retailer in the United States. You can call me PM. Toy Barn has decided to put in this fancy new warehouse management system in our distribution center in Las Vegas, NV. Personally, I don’t see the need. They only push boxes down there in the warehouse. How can a system make any difference? But I don’t make the decisions around here; I just do what they tell me to do. I do these types of projects all the time. I can install a new system in my sleep. There is nothing to it. You flip a few switches in the preferences and turn it on and that’s it.

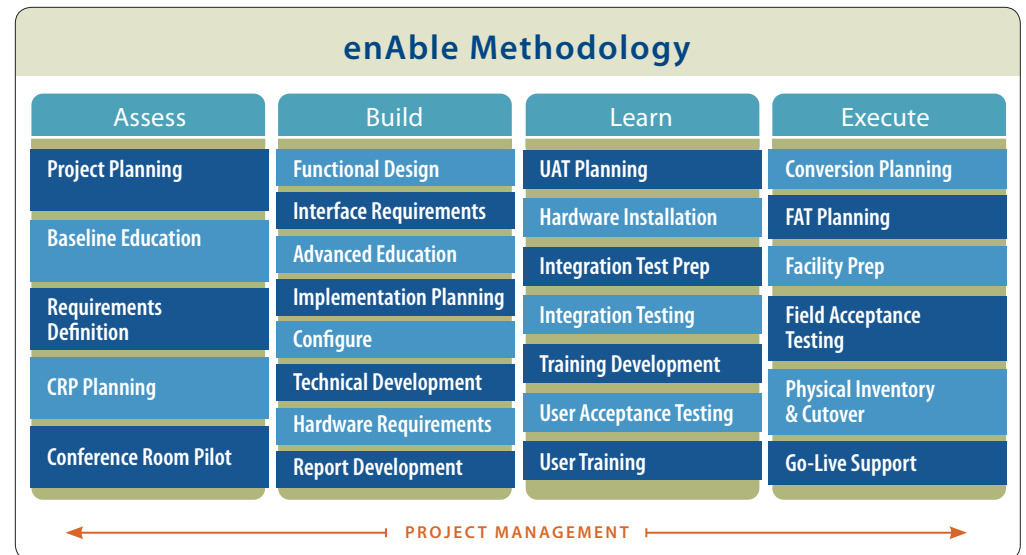
My boss, Peter Determined, seems to think we need to do these formal project steps that he calls a methodology. But I’m here to tell you, that’s a big waste of time. Like I just said, you load the CD, set your preferences, show the users how to turn it on and you’re done. He’s the boss though and he has brought in this young gun from a consulting company to help implement the system. The guy’s name is Steve Innovative and his business

card says “System Integrator”. He says that means he enables his customers to successfully implement warehouse management systems with their other systems and processes.

So, like I said, PD is the boss, so I didn’t put up much of a fight and agreed to go to

the project kick-off meeting where SI was to present the methodology starting with the Project Management component.

SI kicked off the discussion about Project Management with a discussion about expectations and the importance of a good project team. “Team?” I thought



this was my show. "Expectations?" What does that have to do with putting in a new system? You plug it in and do what it says, right?

SI started out by saying, "It's important that realistic expectations are set internally at the Toy Barn and externally with its customers." He went on, "It's crazy to think this will go in without a hitch. You have to set expectations that there will be difficult times internally. There will be bad days and good days at the start." I'm thinking, this guy just dug his own grave. Why would you put in a system if it won't work perfect the first day? And, why would you ever say there may be problems outloud?

Then I hear PD say, "Wow, I never thought of it that way. That's a great point SI. With the correct expectations, we can get full buy-in from the users who will help us develop proper contingencies and also make sure our testing scripts are thorough. If we thought everything would go perfect, we would see no need to create these and then would be unprepared if things did go bad." SI went on to say, "You also have to tell your customer base that you have initiated a customer service improvement project. And that you will be implementing a new WMS that will result in, among other things, faster order turn around, improved order accuracy and transportation savings."

Now he's really done it. There is no way anyone in their right mind would say a word to their customers about this.

Before I could say a word to bury the guy, Candy San Rafael (CSR) spoke up and said,

"What a great idea SI, by proactively sharing this news with our customers, it gives us a chance to communicate to our customers that we are focused on their satisfaction and improving our service to them. This will create a dialogue with our customers and provide an opportunity to collaborate on the design of the new system so it benefits all parties throughout the supply chain. At a much later time and after the project has gained excitement and interest by our customers, we can then introduce the risks associated with a new system. Whew, I was really sweating how I was going to broach this subject with our customers. But your idea of introducing this as a good thing for them, gives me a forum to discuss this with them in a positive light."

Unbelievable. These people are crazy. I can't believe they see the need to set expectations internally and externally. If they did their job right, there would be no need to set these expectations because everything would go perfectly from day one. I need a cup of coffee.

When I return from the break room, SI has a slide up on the wall with the words, "Operations must own the project. "What? I'm in IT and I'm the project manager. I own this project. The operations will use the system, but I'm making the decisions here. SI explained, "Operations must own and drive this project. Operations will be the people who have to live with the decisions made, and therefore they must make all key decisions on how the system will function. System Integrators like myself and your IT department are enablers. We're here to support you and provide advice on how to utilize the system best to satisfy the operational requirements you have."

Support? I'm more than a supporter – I'm a Manager. I manage the project. The Director of IT immediately said, "That is a great way of looking at it. We've always run our projects within the IT department and then deployed to the users. If I let Operations drive this project with our support, we'll minimize the gaps in requirements and then will reduce our need for such a large help desk in IT. By owning the project and decisions made throughout configuration, the operations team will be able to mostly support themselves. Thanks SI, I see this as an opportunity to reduce our labor cost in our help desk department."

SI then explained that with any project of this magnitude, buy-in at all levels is vital to the success of the project. He said, "The director of

operations down to the picker in lane 501 have to believe in this project and the importance of it. Commitment from the department heads will lead the department and put focus on the project and including the lower levels of each department will create buy-in and enthusiasm. This will make the implementation much smoother if the users are actually excited to use the system." Here again, I don't understand what this guy is saying. Why would we want the picker's input? All he does all day is pick toys and put them in boxes. What does he know about picking toys and packing them? Oh wait, SI might have a point there.

Well, I've had enough of this methodology talk. I can't believe this. First he says things won't go that well, then he says a bunch of box pushers need to be in charge of implementing a system. What do they know about what they need? Well, the first part of the kick-off meeting is complete and I'm confused. We've spent two hours talking about Project Management – setting correct expectations and the fact that operations should own this project.

When we return from break, SI mentions we'll dive into the "Assess" phase of this methodology

and discuss the importance of understanding the current processes and requirements and developing the future processes. I can't wait to hear what he has to say about that..

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