The problem with PID's – by Simon Kennish

I often hear from new Project Managers and Project Directors about how much paperwork there is at the start of a project, they invariably moan about the tedious nature of it and how long it will take etc. This just shows how little they understand the value of a good PID and how inexperienced they are in preparing one.

For me a good PID doesn't have to be a huge document, it just needs to cover all the essentials. I recall one meeting with a Project Director at the start of a major project, he had clearly been harmed on a former project and was highly resistant to his team producing a PID. I sat down with him and we agreed that he didn't need to produce a PID – as long as he covered a series of important topics in a thought process and documented it at the end of that thought process. I started by asking what he thought he would need to consider to plan his project. He started coming out with all the usual suspects and as he came up with them I talked thought each to ensure he had the breadth and depth required for each. At the end of the session we agreed that he would be happy for his team to produce a document for all these important areas and that each was essential to the success of the project and his personal reputation, he seemed very pleased that he didn't have to produce a PID.

At this point I suggested that he help me to just check the PID template to see what was included in it that was superfluous, I passed the template to him and as I read out the meeting notes he crossed them off the template – you can guess what happened!

The penny had dropped, he sat back and looked slightly amazed. No one had ever gone through this with him before, he had never made the connection between what was needed to start a project successfully, they had just harped on about how the PID's were a pain, too much paperwork etc. He wanted to know why his team were so anti-PID, as this had clearly affected his opinion.

For me, it's a state of mind, It's not about the paperwork, it's not about a 100+page document, it's just about working out what you need and then using your brain to think it through – that's the hard part! That's the problem with PID's – you need to use your brain to work out what information you need, then to analyse it, work out the solutions and record it. If people spent the time they spend complaining about PID to actually using their brain, their PID would be great

Documenting the output is dead easy in comparison to having to think. The time spent thinking at the start of the project pays so many dividends: removes so many risks, resolves so many timing issues and helps in reducing costs, realising the benefits and increasing quality. I advise my project managers and project directors to lock themselves in a room and work it all out as a team, if they need wet towels on their heads to cool their overheating brains then so be it, they can't just leave it to the project manager to write it.

The outcome of this tale, the Project Director went back to his team and had a meeting behind closed doors, I had a superb PID a week later and the project set off on its course for success – the Project Director was one of my best advocates for good project management from there on.

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