

Recession puts some project managers in good spot

By Steven Birmingham

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As the global economy stagnates and businesses seek new ways to cut costs, project managers must champion the cause of formal project management to add value to their companies or to future employers. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, [small businesses make up 99.7 percent of all employer firms](#), accounting for more than half of all private sector employees.

Many of those firms are unfamiliar with formal project management methodologies or are just starting on the path to optimized project management, [as defined in the Project Management Institute's](#) Organizational Project Management Maturity Model.

Project managers at those companies can make a strong case to push their organization further along the path to improved outcomes and enhanced efficiency. Project managers searching for employment can target small companies and offer their expertise as a way to do business better in the difficult economy.

Executives facing decreasing sales and financial losses will be motivated to listen to ideas to improve project outcomes and the bottom line. Project managers should seize the opportunity presented by the weakened marketplace to strengthen project management practices within their organization or propose to do that for their prospective employer. They should educate executives on the value of project management, especially project management's ability to impact all three elements of the triple constraints of time, cost and scope.

Project managers must be ready to cite examples of successful and unsuccessful projects at their organization or others to combat the misperception that "any experienced businessperson is qualified to run a project." They should have at their fingertips statistics such as [those from the Center for Business Practices](#) showing that strong project management led to a 54 percent improvement in company financial performance, a 36 percent increase in customer satisfaction and a 30 percent boost in employee satisfaction.

They need to be prepared to counter objections such as "planning takes too long," "we've been running projects for many years" and "we're too small to do things so formally" with phrases such as "not planning costs too much," "the old way of doing things may not be sufficient in this economy" and "improving project management now will help the company grow quickly later when things improve."

So, what should project management mean for a small company in 2009? It should mean taking stock of the company's financial health and determining if ways must be sought to do things more efficiently. It should mean evaluating the organization's project management maturity and understanding how to move the organization further toward optimization. It should mean educating executives and other stakeholders on the value of project management not just to projects, but to the entire organization. It should mean hiring project management professionals to help combat today's difficult environment and to position the company for better times tomorrow. And finally, in 2009 as in every other year, project management should mean implementing industry best practices to help make the company successful.

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