ACHIEVING EPIC BUSINESS RESULTS

with STRATEGIC PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Michael M. Bissonette

RTConfidence

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Some people who I want to give specific mention to for their specific support, review and help with this book's content are: Parvaneh Alavi, Thomas Cocotis, Steve Clark, Kelly Flint, Ace Lowder, Allen Lowder, David Maeschen, John Newton, and Craig Trivelpiece.

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PREFACE

What is the “right” way to set up and manage Projects? Is there a “single approach” that works for successfully managing ALL Projects? If there was, wouldn’t we all know it by now? We would, but we do not know it because there is no such “animal”. The Project Management Institute (PMI®) has endeavored to establish World-Wide Standards to help us figure this out, but even with all the credentialed individuals (e.g. Project Management Professionals, or PMP®s) in the world, organizations still struggle to consistently succeed at developing new Products, Services and Results to the satisfaction of Organizational Leaders and the market. What are we missing? I believe that to a degree, we are not strategic enough. Thus, the impetus behind the creation of this book.

It seems to be a cliché, but we all know that organizations that consistently “do more with less” win. How do we get costs down? How do we produce more (and better) business offerings in less time and effort than anyone else? And how can we do this without killing the morale of our workforce? If you (as an Organizational Leader) could figure this out, wouldn’t you want to? My contention is that it is not only about knowing the Project Management processes, Tools & Techniques, and how to execute them well. It involves much more, and fortuitously (as I see it) it all starts at the top of the organization, and if initiated at the top, it is much more likely to gain traction and “stick”.

I have been in the corporate world for over 4 decades now. Been in several different industries. Worked my way up the “corporate ladder”. Wrote a textbook published by PMI®, and have been teaching a post-graduate course on Strategic Project Management for several years. I have learned much, and I have endeavored to pass this knowledge on to others. I also have many stories to tell, and my students tend to appreciate them. I am frequently told by past students that the stories and their underlining concepts made a positive impact on their work performance. This feedback, and my innate passion to help others succeed, has compelled me to write this book on Strategic Project Management, and to do so in first-person to better share the rationale

behind a very logical and persuasive framework for organizational success. The word "**Epic**" comes from my son, who has always been quite the "gamer" – it is defined as "**extending beyond the usual or ordinary**" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). I know that the concepts espoused in this book do indeed work, for I have seen it first-hand. Thus, "**Achieving Epic Business Results with Strategic Project Management**" works, but it takes more than just the knowledge, understanding, and appropriate tools – it takes a willing "mind-set" that is permeated throughout the organization as well. This is where the "strategic" piece comes into play.

At different times in my career I considered successful Project performance to be primarily due to some single profound focus area (e.g. Risk Management, Requirements Management, the "Cost of Change", Leadership, Planning and Maintaining a Balanced Plan, etc.). I have come to recognize that it is all about the complimentary interaction of these various concepts, each of which is a chapter topic. Since these concepts do interact with each other, there is a fair amount of cross-referencing. It is the "strategic" path undertaken by the organization which effectively under-pins the individual efforts of good Program or Project Managers and Teams. This necessitates a healthy combination of individual capabilities coupled with the appropriate level of Organizational Governance. Both are therefore aptly addressed.

I have also recognized that the "technical" language associated with Project Management concepts tends to get confusing at times and can make a book like this difficult to read. Many of the nouns referred to can also be verbs (e.g. project, schedule, cost, resources, etc.), and we tend to group two or more words together into a phrase to describe specific items of interest. So, I capitalize those groupings (like how acronyms are basically called out), and sometimes use quotation marks to emphasis certain key words/phrases. This helps me communicate my thoughts better and will hopefully enable readers to comprehend the messages with greater ease. I truly believe that the concepts and suggestions are all logical and sensible, and together they can be combined to help you **Achieve Epic Business Results with Strategic Project Management.**

About the Author

Mike Bissonette has worked in several industries and in various positions throughout his career. Went from “Rocket Scientist” to Technical Lead, and eventually did what he had aspired to do – became a respected Program Manager within the Aerospace and Defense industry. He was one of the early users of Integrated Master Scheduling software – which ran on large “mainframe” computers, using “punch-card” decks that were batch-processed overnight. He was also one of the early users of Monte Carlo Modelling & Simulation for SRA (Schedule Risk Analysis). He “cut his teeth” on Earned Value Management when it was called Cost/Schedule Control System Criteria, and on Six Sigma when it was a little less formal/rigorous and referred to as Total Quality Management. He ended up becoming a successful Program/Project Manager and occasional organizational training asset. Eventually the Aerospace and Defense company that he worked for (an eventual Lockheed Martin acquisition) moved across country and he opted to enter the Consumer Electronics industry.

At Western Digital Mike become a “change agent”. He arrived at a time when the company was struggling (the Hard Disk Drive industry was a “dog-eat-dog” competitive environment) and by the time he left, had run and transformed several Functional Departments (e.g. New Product Introduction, System Engineering, Program Management Office, World-Wide Quality, Product Management, and Electronics Procurement), established the iterative/incremental Hard Disk Drive Product Development Process that became the industry standard and helped enable Western Digital to become and remain an industry leader – one of only two remaining “power-houses” in that industry at the time of this publication. He was then recruited to run and transform a division of an innovative company that focused on Clean Technology and Aerospace and Defense – AeroVironment.

Mike became an Officer of AeroVironment, Inc. where he led the company into the nascent, and highly competitive Electric Vehicle

Charging industry, becoming the preferred supplier of EVSE (Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment) for several familiar companies in the Automotive industry, and championed organizational and IT Infrastructure changes to enable growth and business success.

Mike is a best-selling published Author (wrote ***Project Risk Management: A Practical Implementation Approach***, published by PMI®, Inc. ©2016), an Adjunct Professor within Clarkson University's Master of Science in Engineering Management curriculum teaching "Strategic Project Management", and a Founder of RTConfidence, Inc. – a company that develops SaaS (Software as a Service) products for Portfolio, Program and Project Management, and provides various business consulting and training services. He is an EIR (Expert in Residence) at the UC Irvine's Applied Innovation Center, where he helps Start-up Companies. And he is a VIP (Volunteer in Probation) who visits, and mentors (on behalf of the Catholic Church) young men incarcerated at detention facilities.

Mike holds a BSEE from Clarkson University, an MSEE from CSU, Long Beach, an MBA from UC Irvine, and a PfMP® (Portfolio Management Professional) certification through PMI®.

Mike has also been an active contributor to PMI's Global Standard publications: *The Guide to the Project Manager Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* Sixth Edition (PMI Inc., ©2017), and *The Standard for Portfolio Management* Fourth Edition (PMI Inc., ©2017).

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the basic "block and tackling" (or tactics) associated with Project Management are important for ensuring that Project Teams perform as well as they can. But as with most successful businesses, tactical execution is not, in and of itself, the only important part of the job – the over-arching strategy underpinning those tactics is the essential ingredient for organization-wide, consistent success. That said, what exactly is this ***Strategic Project Management*** that I allude to, and how does it differ from ***Project Management***? And why is it so important in enabling organizations to ***Achieve Epic Business Results***? This book explains.

Let us start from the top. Business leaders strive to continually improve on "what works well, and what does not" within their organizations – they realize that this typically leads to more productive and profitable outcomes. We normally want to **Achieve Epic Business Results** (i.e. performance that extends beyond the ordinary) on our most important financial metrics. Bottom-line, business leaders want their organizations to prosper, and stakeholders (including the people both within and outside the organization) all want to reap the rewards. To achieve "Epic-level" results, you must first have a good understanding of what it means to be successful – then establish and execute effective strategies and "game-plans" to make it happen. Success can be defined in many ways, but there are several indicators/measures which tend to corroborate whether a business organization is indeed successful. One measure might be performance-based objective evidence that the Vision and Mission Statements are being satisfied. Another might be how the Stock Price is performing. Some other generally accepted indicators are:

- Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty
- Recognition for Products with "Best-in-Class" Quality
- Being a Preferred Supplier
- Recognition for Best Value Offerings
- Being a Popular Investment Choice

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- Being Recognized as a Good Place to Work
- Recognized for Top Performing Products
- Producing the Highest Sales, Revenues and/or Margins within the industry

Whatever measurements are used to gauge success, there is usually a clear expectation that to achieve acceptable results, a solid Business Strategy and Operating Plan, coupled with solid leadership and high-output workforce performance is needed within On-Going Operations by the various Functional Groups and Projects undertaken in support of Strategic Initiatives. This Book focuses on the latter – i.e. the coordinated activities that work best for achieving "Epic-level" results on strategically important Projects conducted to elevate the organization's value proposition. And since ALL Projects should be intimately aligned to Business Strategies and Initiatives, they should ALL be appropriately managed to achieve the kind of results needed (and expected) to bolster organizational business success and improve stakeholder wealth.

A common complaint that I have heard at various companies is "Our innovation and performance are stifled by the bureaucratic procedures and requirements imposed by ***management***." This may or may not be true. So, where do you draw the line between being too lax (i.e. exerting few or no controls) and too rigid/bureaucratic (i.e. exerting too much control) relative to Project Team Governance? On one extreme, employees tend to like working at their own pace and not having to deal with management interference/intervention or deadlines. On the other hand, Organizational Managers are typically expected to develop winning strategies and meet critical business commitments – and they do not usually have the latitude or luxury to avoid or ignore stakeholder expectations. I call that ideal middle ground the place where ***Strategic Project Management*** practices come into play. My experiences have caused me to realize that we can **Achieve Epic Business Results with Strategic Project Management.** So, let's investigate "why" and "how".

INTRODUCTION

Years ago, I began teaching a post-graduate college course entitled "Strategic Project Management" – a core course for earning an MS-EM (Master of Science in Engineering Management) degree. This MS-EM curriculum is designed for full-time professionals endeavoring to advance their careers and is basically an alternative to pursuing and obtaining an MBA (Master's in Business Administration) degree. Thus, the students are not necessarily taking this course to become expert Project Managers, but rather, to become more capable and better prepared Organizational Managers and executives. Not being an academic, I created a syllabus based on what I believed to be the fundamental "strategic" concepts that managers should understand and apply to ensure Projects under their purview are well planned and executed. If so, they improve internal capabilities, strengthen competitiveness, and ultimately produce better business results. I drew upon decades of relevant experience in leading the development of a myriad of successful Products and Services within several industries, working in many different roles. I started out by endeavoring to articulate the most rational working definition of Strategic Project Management I could find. Unfortunately, I did not find a suitable definition published anywhere, so I derived one by first considering the meaning of "Strategic Management" and expanding upon that definition to define "Strategic Project Management."

Strategic Management

"The formulation and implementation of the major goals and initiatives taken by a company's top management on behalf of owners, based on consideration of resources and an assessment of the internal and external environments in which the organization competes. It provides overall direction to the enterprise and involves specifying the organization's objectives, developing policies and plans designed to achieve these objectives, and then allocating resources to implement the plans. It is not static in nature: the models often include a feedback loop to monitor execution and inform the next round of planning." (Wikipedia, 2018)

I cannot argue with that definition of Strategic Management for it makes perfect sense from my experience. Inserting the word "Project", the following definition for "Strategic Project Management" emerges:

> ***Strategic Project Management***
>
> The formation and implementation of over-arching Project Management guidelines and initiatives taken by an organization's management on behalf of Project Stakeholders, based on resources and an assessment of tools, techniques and competencies considered "Best Practices" for Projects being implemented to meet Organizational Strategic Goals and Objectives. It provides overall direction to the enterprise and involves specifying the organization's Project Management objectives, developing policies and plans designed to achieve these objectives, and then allocating resources to implement the plans. It is often not static in nature, for it includes a feedback loop to monitor execution, develop and enact systemic change and inform subsequent Projects.

I believe that the above definition is "spot on". Fundamentally, "**Strategic** Project Management" is not "**Advanced** Project Management", but something more over-arching and expansive – more than how to simply manage a Project better, but how to successfully manage all Projects enterprise-wide, consistently with confidence and with results that meet or exceed stakeholder expectations. Doing so in an optimal way necessitates recognition of "management's" role in the process, as well as understanding of the tools, techniques, and competencies necessary to optimize Project Team performance capabilities. Couple this technical understanding with the general objective/goal to get the most production out of the organization's resources (i.e. continually "do more with less"), in the most positive way relative to employee satisfaction and development, and you have an incredibly powerful "formula-for-success". From an experiential standpoint, I know this works. Many of my past students have taken it upon themselves to champion this mindset within their organizations, to the bests of their abilities. This has led me to the

realization that I should introduce others to the over-arching benefits of Strategic Project Management concepts and the underlying principles which enable organizations to **Achieve Epic Business Results**. Thus, the genesis of this book.

My objective is to provide readers with sensible insights into proven processes that work and do so with anecdotal examples to drive the key points home. An added advantage to this Strategic Project Management approach is that when practiced in a cohesive way, everybody (Executives, Functional/Organizational Managers, Project Managers, and Team Members) all have their needs met – which is hard to criticize.

As one might infer from this book's chapter titles, over the years I have concluded that flawless, productive Project Management is all about various "key concepts" – as listed, per chapter. Interestingly, I have expanded this conclusion to recognize that true Strategic Project Management is essentially all about the symbiotic interaction of these various key concepts. Thus, the content of this book is fundamentally high level, but each chapter is written to convey a stand-alone logical concept or principle that can be readily digested and implemented. Readers should be able to see the inter-relationships between these concepts – and if not all of them, at least some. Further, experienced Organizational Managers should be able to "connect the dots" and see the holistic benefits that the aggregate can produce – in particular, from an organizational performance stand-point, to ensure the type of results needed to achieve or exceed Organizational Strategic Business Goals and Objectives.

This text does not only contain descriptions of key concepts, but also examples to effectively articulate their benefits – all drawn from many years of practical experiences and revelations I have arrived at from an innate determination to continually learn from mistakes and improve. I am passionate about this subject, in part because the conclusions are logical (i.e. not based on esoteric "silver bullet" methodologies), and I have seen and experienced the benefits that can result from the practical application of these important principles.

Although the chapters are placed in an order that seems most appropriate (and logical) for the flow of information, they are meant (as mentioned earlier) to be stand-alone as well – so feel free to skip around. My ultimate hope is that Organizational Leaders and managers who read this book (especially those who endeavor to make positive changes within their enterprises) may see the benefit of (and implement) changes which align with this philosophy. Even if the reading of this book leads to only one small positive change to your organization's performance, I will consider this publication a major success. That said, I firmly believe that organizations who follow this holistic approach in its entirety will prosper the most, for these concepts do inter-relate and support each other, and like a well-oiled machine, when all parts are running smoothly the output is maximized – and that enables us to achieve those Epic Business Results we are all seeking.

I also provide 5 Questions at the end of each chapter for your consideration. They enable you to evaluate and keep tabs on how well you believe your organization embraces the key Strategic Project Management concepts conveyed in that chapter. Obviously, this is a somewhat imprecise assessment, and resulting scores do not mean a lot in-and-of themselves. The idea here is to provide a general assessment tool that can be used to baseline your operations, and to periodically reassess – as a way of measuring your organization's progress in practicing **Strategic Project Management**.

Best of fortunes to you all! I am confident that Strategic Project Management works and encourage you to consider these underlying ideas. At a high level, Achieving Epic Business Results on all Projects undertaken should: maximize overall business performance; provide growth; and ensure the type of success epitomized by the success factors noted at the beginning of this introductory chapter.