

Prior Learning Assessment – Final Draft

Project Management – DCM 302

DePaul University

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## Introduction

The PLA that I am demonstrating is Project Management DCM 302. This PLA is based on the experience gained, skills learned, and skills used in the planning and executing of a Supplier EXPO for the Canadian market with [Well-Known Hotel Chain]. From this experience I learned strategy and planning, sales & marketing, interpersonal skills, research, and teamwork. Project Management is an essential skill in business, as explained by Sanders Reach in the article “What You Need to Know About Project Management” (2021): “The benefits of project management are that it can help control and predict costs, control risk, create transparency, improve efficiency, streamline all aspects of a matter in one place...and improve remote collaboration.” (2021, p.24).

The learning outcomes I will be matching for this PLA are:

- Communicating effectively in a business setting.
- Recognizing different roles required in a successful project team.
- Establishing a Project Communications Plan to keep a project on track.
- Recognizing how innovation and technology drive project economics.
- Using computer software and the Internet for project documentation, control and information research.
- Identifying the basic steps and tools found in all modern project management methodologies.
- Estimating project risk and formulating contingency plans to minimize it.
- Assessing project status via Gantt Charting.
- Documenting and tabulating all project details.
- Understanding how project management applies to information systems.

### **The Learning Experience**

In my previous role as Sr. Manager of Field Operations (Supply Management) for [Well-Known Hotel Chain] Canada from 2014 to 2019, I worked very closely with hotels, management groups, and major stakeholders to identify needs and then implement purchasing programs with local as well as national and US suppliers. Some of my major goals in 2019 included increasing hotel spend compliance nationally by 5%, improving overall program spend and increasing negotiating leverage. A big part of achieving this was facilitating relationship building between key people. Due to the relatively small size of the Canadian market vs the US, much of the corporate programs and events were US centric and so much of the content was not applicable to Canada. I decided the best way to accomplish my goals was to create an event specifically for Canadian properties, so I created an Expo event in Toronto at a [Well-Known Hotel Chain]. I knew that if I could bring all the decision makers and supplier contacts together under one roof, I could create so many new relationships, educate decision makers on the capabilities of key suppliers, and I could really grow the business. As this was the first time an event like this had been done in this market I knew that I needed to project manage all the way from inception to completion of the event itself. As part of this I also wanted to ensure I completed a thorough postmortem afterwards with the entire team to identify which areas worked well as well as areas of improvement for the future events.

The inaugural Canadian expo was a huge success with 63 suppliers covering all categories from food & beverage, property operations, chemical, to uniforms and linen companies exhibiting. This was also attended by over 150 guests including general managers,

executive chefs, directors of housekeeping, operations managers, directors of engineering etc., and key corporate decision makers from management companies in attendance. The first day was the setup from 10am to 5pm where suppliers arrived and set up their booth with banners, audio visual, samples, and products to showcase what they do. At 5pm the main event hall was locked by security until the following morning. That evening I held a welcome reception for all my supplier partners that had travelled to be there. I gave a welcome speech, thanked everyone for coming, introduced and thanked all of my team, and went over the sequence of events for the next day. This was then followed by drinks, passed hors d'oeuvres, and a live band. This was a great opportunity to spend some quality time with my supplier partners before the attendees came the next day. The next morning, I had a breakfast meeting with my team to go through the final details, get everyone excited for the event, and answer any final questions. The Expo itself was held from 10am to 5pm. I had assigned roles to my team to work with the hotel team for supplier needs and man the check-in table where guests were given name badge lanyards, event books, and reusable tote bags to collect information as they walked the show. I also identified people to walk the expo with VIP guests and invited team members from our customer engagement team so they could hold private meetings with management groups that wanted to discuss signing up additional hotels onto our programs. This event led to significant quantifiable increases in program spend with a yearly growth of 8% and a 20% increase in compliance from quarterly SLC (Supplier Level Compliance) reports. I received extremely positive feedback from attendees, exhibitors, event managers, as well as my colleagues and especially my VP. Please attached appendix A, p.7 which shows the success of the event and therefore my project management ability. After any large event like this I know to let the dust settle for a week and then complete a postmortem to review what aspects worked, and what I would change moving

forward. Following the success of this event and the internal promotion of the results within my company, other regional managers and directors outside of the US felt that this type of event would be beneficial to increasing their program spend and sought my help with the planning and execution. I worked with regional colleagues to roll this same event out in Colombia (July 2019), Mexico City (September 2019), and Puerto Rico (November 2019) using my same plans, framework, and timeframes while making some adjustments for the local markets. This experience has led me to be much more open to new ideas and opportunities rather than relying on existing tried and tested methods.

This project allowed me to build upon and develop a number of key skills and learn more about the entire project management process. I found the strategy and planning aspect of managing this project was one of the most essential parts. Planning this out in advance, working backwards from the Expo date, and adding a timeline of all deadlines was crucial in allowing me to put a buffer of time in place in case I ran behind. It also allowed me to feel confident that I was on schedule and even get ahead so that I was not under as much pressure and could make changes. I learned that adding everything to this planned timeline gave me a daily checklist to do including when to send out emails and notifications to ensure maximum attendance. There were a lot of areas that I wanted to focus more time on as project management at this scale was a new area to me; this was essential when I was exploring new areas from creating floor plans to booking entertainment. I also wanted extra time to make sure the marketing items were perfect so I could make changes.

### **Learning outcomes – Part 1**

- Identifying the basic steps and tools found in all modern project management methodologies.
- Communicating effectively in a business setting.
- Recognizing different role required in a successful project team.

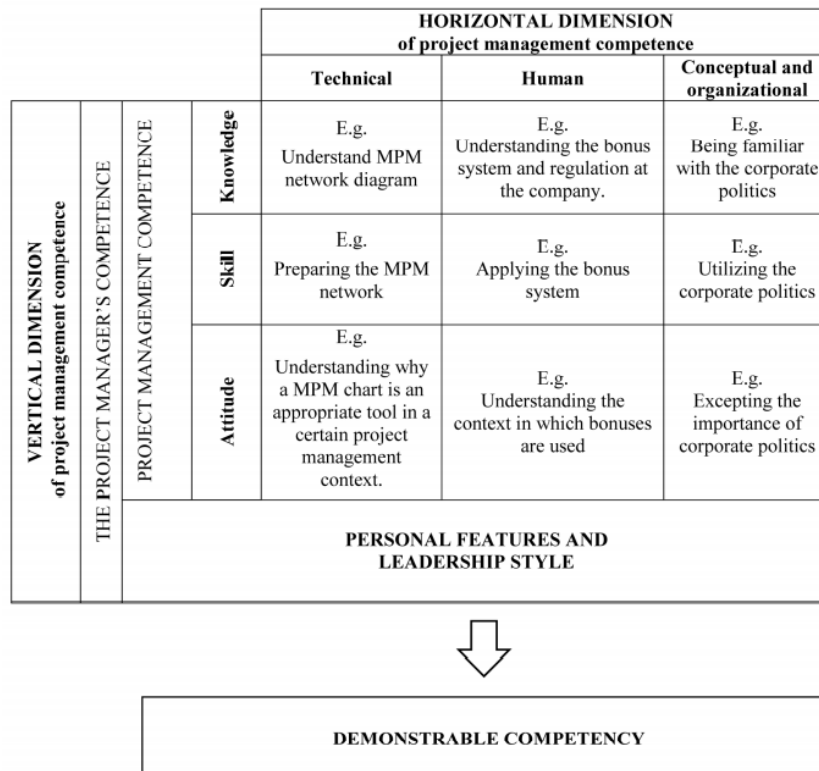
### **Academic Knowledge**

My research looked at two different approaches to project management: an agile approach as well as a traditional approach. In the research article titled “Exploring the link between project management approach and project success dimensions: A structural model approach. *Advances in Production Engineering & Management*” Ciric et al., (2021) the authors have contrasted the different models and analyzed success rates from each. The structure of the traditional project management style relates to my experience as this was what I used to plan my project; this was a project designed with specific requirements, based on an initial fixed budget, and was plan-oriented from what I wanted my team to achieve. Looking at the points from the agile style I found this relates to the projects I managed after this one based on replicating the success of this event. These projects involved greater collaboration within the local markets to understand regional customs, needs, and requirements. This was also an evolutionary model that was adapted from the Toronto project. “Bringing a project to a successful closing requires integrating numerous management variables such as planning, directing, team building, team communication, cost and schedule management, client involvement, requirements, change management, stakeholders management, etc” (Ciric et al., 2021, p.100). These are all the key

steps I used when managing my project and were of equal importance; I had to really understand the market and the end goals to ensure all aspects were relevant.

Another paper I researched defines what competency in project management is, evaluates different many different models of competency, and proposes its own model below based on its findings.

Table 12 The integrated model of project management competency



This grid shows how the attributes of knowledge, skill, and attitude intersect with technical, human, and conceptual and organizational competencies to create a well-rounded project manager. One example from my project was understanding what value my company expected to gain from this event: this would fall under the ‘Human’ and ‘Attitude’ section.

This paper breaks down the makeup of all competency as human skill, conceptual and organizational skill, and technical skill. I found that these were all equally important focal points when managing my project--it was essential that I could build and maintain effective relationships with colleagues, suppliers, and attendees. I needed conceptualizing skills as this was a new project for this market; organizational skills to make this happen and keep things on track; and technical skills to understand every detail that needs to be in place to execute effectively. In the article "Project management competence – definitions, models, standards and practical implications", Horvath states "Nowadays, project management is a complex job. Having the classical project management technical skills is not sufficient anymore to achieve success on projects... Beyond these skills there is a growing need for skills in leadership, strategic or business management." (2019, p.3). I agree with Horvath because having a much more rounded skillset will make managing future projects more successful. In my project experience I had to pivot out of my comfort zone to event planning which forced me to rely on my business management background.

I also researched why using outdated or deficient methods and standards in relation to project management can be unfavorable and how the new processes are cost oriented. The authors defined six key components that if missing from a method would be detrimental in specific way. These are the six areas along with examples from my own project:

- Knowing the limitations of the project – The Expo had to be a one day show and limited only to current suppliers and not potential.
- Knowing the project scope – 60 suppliers, and 150 properties invited.
- Work breakdown structure – Breaking Expo down in to manageable and actionable tasks, assigning payment reconciliation to colleague with weekly update.



- Time management – Working backwards from project goal and use of Gantt chart.
- Cost management - Raising enough money to cover all costs and staying within budget.
- Quality management – Ensuring assigned roles throughout to maintain standards.

One area that I found related to my experience was how the model breaks down the core areas of a project into time, cost, goal, and outcome. I created a P&L to estimate all costs and fully understand how much money I would have to raise to fund my project. I needed to ensure all plans for my Expo would be completely in line with my initial goals of increasing program spend and compliance throughout Canada, and that as I got closer to the date and into the details, it was beneficial to refocus on these four fundamentals. One quote that I thought was very relevant was from the article “The Effectiveness of Cost-Oriented Project Management Process in Businesses” (2018): Ezerarslan writes “Many projects could have social, economic and environmental effects which are older than the project itself as well as being undertaken in order to bring about a permanent outcome” (2018, p.1453). I think it is important to understand that while individual projects are temporary in nature (i.e. this was an Expo that ended on [a specific date]), the effects can be long-lasting, which needs to always present in mind. I was representing my company and the image I created. From the email blasts, attendees’ experience when they walked through the door, to the follow up and support they receive afterward, are all lasting impressions of the competence and ability that I present.

### **Connection**

My first stage in my Expo project was to build a business proposal that I would need to present to my direct manager to get their approval so I could proceed. This was not a budgeted expense, so I needed to raise the money from suppliers attending to fund this project and cover

all costs. This had to include a basic outline of what I wanted to do, goals and how they related to my 2019 goals for my market, as well as a ROI (return on investment) for any potential costs that we may have to incur including justifying the number of my hours spent on this. I also needed to prepare a financial business plan along with a P&L (profit and loss) on what I thought the costs and revenue would show including an overall profit. See appendix B, P&L; I have attached this as it shows how I used this as a working document from initial presentation to final profit made from event. This experience relates to:

- Identifying the basic steps and tools found in all modern project management methodologies.

For the visual and design aspect of my project I needed to work with key people within the hotel that was hosting the expo as well as delegate some design work to the sales and marketing team within my company. I oversaw and produced all visual aids for this event including email blasts to get supplier and attendees interested and create excitement, all signage and banners for the day of the event, apparel for my team working the event, booklets for attendees that promoted all the suppliers that were showcased, as well as all internal [Well-Known Hotel Chain] communications to other corporate departments that would support my project and help promote.

Overall, delegating was one of the most important aspects of planning and executing my event. I brought several colleagues to Toronto from other regions and disciplines to assist me with the execution over several days and had assigned duties and responsibilities. This set me up well as I could assign duties like manning the welcome desk, recording attendees and issuing lanyards, bags, events books etc., handling all food and beverage requirements with the hotel, and having a point person that suppliers could communicate specific needs to on the day so that I

could be free to host the event for the attendees and focus all my efforts where it was needed. Having people around that were excited to be part of this event allowed me to not get pulled away from my main role to deal with smaller, less productive issues. I also found that having everything planned ahead of time and conducting regular scheduled meetings helped to identify potential risks and contingency plans and kept people engaged. This experience relates to:

- Recognizing different role required in a successful project team.

Having an effective communication strategy was essential during my project. I held regular meetings with my team from planning to execution to stay on top of what needed to be done and go over updates. I also sent out weekly emails to show progress on my Gantt chart as well as which suppliers had paid etc., and which attendees had confirmed. As we all live in different parts of the US and Canada this was done by phone calls every 2 weeks on the lead up, and then switched to weekly as the date got closer. Communicating with suppliers was done through targeted emails at strategic times to get people interested as well as follow-up phone calls to those that wanted more information. There was specific information I needed back from each supplier as well as a commitment to the event so I sent forms whenever possible so that I could retain greater control over the information I got back. Examples include attendee forms, information for the booklet forms, room booking forms, as well as invoices and credit card forms. I also communicated all bank and wire transfer information to each supplier via email. After the event was over, I communicated names and contact information of all attendees so they could follow up on any conversations. One of the most important areas of communication was to the customers/attendees. It was vital that I timed this correctly so that I maintained a professional image, got people excited about the Expo, gave plenty of notice, and didn't overwhelm people

with information. It was important to ensure they got regular communication via email and phone calls to targeted individuals that I really wanted to attend. This experience relates to:

- Communicating effectively in a business setting.

Another area of communication I thought was important was communicating internally within the company what I was doing and sharing successes. For this I invited a colleague from my company who interviewed attendees and suppliers on camera to be part of our quarterly video message that went out companywide.

### **Learning outcomes – Part 2**

- Establishing a project communications plan to keep a project on track.
- Estimating project risk and formulating contingency plans to minimize it.
- Assessing project status via Gantt charting.
- Documenting and tabulating all project details.

### **Academic Knowledge**

I researched the different methods of risk management aspects related to project management. I also looked at ways to implement these principles into a company strategy. One idea that relates to my experience is where Kafol (2016) says how risks are managed using a system of avoiding risk, mitigation of risk, and lastly accepting risk, in the article “Project risk management methodology in practice” (Kafol, 2016). Kafol has used a points system to define and quantify the level of risk: “The possible outcomes of an event are considered the consequences of risks. These consequences can be positive or negative, and are assessed with regard to achieving established objectives. A points system is used in order to categorize risk

according to predefined criteria” (2016, p.449). While I did not use a points system in my project, I recognize the benefits. Had the risks been higher, for example larger scope and budget, this structure could have been implemented. With or without the points system, the concept of quantifying risk ensures that you have removed unnecessary risk and planned for those that you may have to deal with; this is a view that I incorporated into planning my event by planning out potential problems like reduced attendee commitment, lower operating budget, and scheduling conflicts. A quote that I agree with is when Kafol states “A common problem in project management within an organization is its non-compliance with the strategic direction of the company.” (Kafol, 2016). I agree because I made sure my project was in line with the strategic direction of the company by matching the desired outcomes to my 2019 goals as well as present a business case for the event and sought approval before commencing. I researched Gantt charts as the best tool for planning my event. According to Robles (2018) a Gantt chart is the most recognizable charts of project management, using the two variables of time and tasks. This system uses time on the horizontal x-axis and tasks on the y-axis, with the point that intersects being a colored box that often represents the status of the task.

### **Connection**

Once I was given approval to proceed, I had to create a timeline planner (see appendix B, Timeline Planner Tab), then moved that information into a Gantt chart. I have attached appendix B, Gantt Chart Tab which shows how the Gantt chart allowed me to see the current status of each task highlighted in different colors to determine if this task had not yet been started, was in progress, or had been completed. Working backwards to the Expo date I needed to ensure I had covered all aspects, could assign specific tasks to colleagues, and ensure everything stayed on

track. Throughout the early stages I learned the importance of quantifying a project based on projected numbers into actual dollars. This was beneficial not only to produce give goals to work to but also helps to sell the proposal. I found that creating a timeline chart helped me to feel confident that I was on track despite so many moving pieces. This experience relates directly to:

- Assessing project status via Gantt charting.
- Documenting and tabulating all project details.

I built a projects communication plan into my timeline and worked backwards knowing that I would need 10 weeks to successfully plan and execute this project. Items included targeted email blasts to suppliers and customers, bi-weekly then weekly team calls, regular scheduled with the events team at the hotel, email updates from my finance team to my team and me to update on all payments received for my P&L. This allowed me to maintain control of the project and gave me the ability to escalate areas of concern as soon as they arose, such as if a supplier backed out or payments were late. This experience relates directly to the learning outcome of:

- Establishing a project communications plan to keep a project on track.

Maintaining and updating my P&L was key to estimating project risk and formulating contingency plans to minimize cost if necessary and stay on top of this project. I built an initial business plan P&L for 50 suppliers to attend and broke down my budget costs based on this. As I did not have any budget coming from my company, I had to ensure I did not go over budget. A few contingency plans that I prepared for were:

- If I only got 40 suppliers instead of the target 50, I had another event space on hold in the same hotel that would cost less and house a smaller number of exhibitors.
- Food packages for the event were provisionally tiered in case I had to cut back on spending.

- I put three colleagues flying into Toronto as provisional based on the number of exhibitors as they would not have been needed with fewer people. This would eliminate flights, hotel rooms, and expenses if necessary.

This experience directly relates to:

- Estimating project risk and formulating contingency plans to minimize it.

I also built in a buffer to allow for any unexpected expenses. In the end I had 63 exhibitors so I was able to exchange the cost of a booth for things like logo event apparel for those working, booklets of the Expo to give out to attendees, and free samples to all guests.

### **Learning outcomes – Part 3**

- Recognizing how innovation and technology drive project economics.
- Understanding how project management applies to information systems.
- Using computer software and the internet for project documentation, control and information research.

### **Academic Knowledge**

While researching computer software and technology drivers for project management I referenced “Sustainable survival pyramid model to balance four factors of cost, quality, risk and time limitation in project management under uncertainty” (Safai, 2020). Safai discusses mathematical algorithms to optimize the four factors of cost, quality, time, and risk in relation to project management. One idea that relates to my experience is the importance of project planning and scheduling; I used this planning method and scheduling key steps that needed to be accomplished in order to stay on schedule and review on a regular basis to ensure everything was

covered. One quote that I agree with is where Safai states “In the past, decisions to accelerate the project included time and cost considerations. But recently it has been suggested that the quality of the project be taken into account as well” (2020, p.288). I think that projects will always need some flexibility as goals and budget changes can alter along the way, but it is important to recognize that while implementing change may have positive outcomes in terms of time and potentially saving money it may also damage the quality and therefore success of the overall project.

### **Connection**

Technology and innovation were particularly essential in driving this project forward, as I needed to plan and manage the whole process in Toronto from my home in Chicago. I also relied heavily on my team who were based in Atlanta, Houston, Puerto Rico, San Francisco, and McLean, VA. This allowed me to pivot from my normal role into this short-term project manager role. None of this would have been possible without the use of Skype calls, email blasts, sending contracts for e-signature, and bank wire transfers. This experience relates directly to:

- Recognizing how innovation and technology drive project economics.
- Understanding how project management applies to information systems.
- Using computer software and the internet for project documentation, control and information research.

My project management experience also relied on information systems in this experience by having the ability to store and update all working documents onto a shared drive that my colleagues and I can all update and view at any time to keep them live. An area where internet access was vital was when it came to approving designs for the booklet artwork, uploading



supplier data and logos, and working with marketing to develop effective artwork for the event that represented the company brand and communicated the goals of the event in an effective way. In the article “Project Management and Information Technology” the authors Binjaku et al. (2013) argue that project management is made much easier and more effective by implementing the use of new technologies. Their examples from 2013 include the use of mobile phones and cloud storage. While these specific technologies just eight years later no longer seem revolutionary, the constant innovation in the technological sector makes the sentiment of staying up to date with technology in project management evergreen.

### **Conclusion**

Planning and executing this event was a huge learning curve for me and really helped to round off my skillset in project management. The experience took me out of my comfort zone as this type of project was not something I had done before. I was able to pull many aspects together as well as create planning documents with what needed to be done before the Expo, which also helped to break down a large project into manageable chunks and start to feel confident that I was on schedule, and even get a head start on other aspects. Identifying and collaborating with industry professionals that I work with was key to the eventual success. Following the postmortem, I think I would have changed the hours of the event as some suppliers felt the 4pm finish was too late and most attendees came first thing in the morning and early afternoon. In the article by Ezerarslan one of the key areas of project management is knowing the limitations of your project (Ezerarslan, 2018); while I think I did a good job in anticipating most limitations, one area that I could have better foreseen was the schedules of the attendees.

Based on attendance, feedback, and enthusiasm within my own company to execute similar future events, I would measure this project a success. In addition, although the scope of this project was not to generate revenue, my final P&L showed a profit of over \$20,000 which I was able to reinvest in future projects. The experience of project managing this Expo allowed me to use the same tools and planning aspects when rolling out similar events in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia following the success at the inaugural event in Canada.

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