

## ***Working in the Real World: Project Process Management***

Projects never live in a vacuum. Somewhere, someone holds power over every project and asserts a right of review. In truth, there are often many corporate masters, each with their own idea of what hoops the project leader should jump through during the life of the project.

Approvals are the essential instruments of the business process. Approvals are required to start, to fund, to hire, to change objectives, to begin field test, to release to the marketplace. Approvals are the gates that control the expenditure of resources. All standards and practices are ultimately enforced through the use of approval processes. Approvals may be required from customers, sponsors, and regulatory agencies.

As critical as approvals are, they are also messy. An approval is not a task that you can put on a project plan and expect the CIO to report on a timesheet. Rather it is a business decision that controls the life of the project. A failure to obtain an approval can have dire consequences. A failure to know when to ask for one may be just as bad. When it comes to obtaining approvals, the project leader is the supplicant, not the master.

Implementing an approval process consistently across a large portfolio of projects requires automation to prevent it from becoming an administrative burden. There must be an efficient way for approval requests to be vetted and passed to the approver, and for the approval to be logged on the project. The project leader must not be permitted to skip or short circuit the process or to request approvals when established preconditions have not been met. Multiple people may be required for some approvals. Proper override mechanisms must exist to prevent bottlenecks. And there must be a way to instruct project leaders to recognize and comply with the requirements.

Like every other aspect of business, the approvals that are required for a particular project may well change during the life of that project. Projects started in boom times may suddenly be subject to monthly budget re-approvals as the purse tightens. A new manager may decide that additional gates are needed to reduce risk. The standards set by the quality organization or regulatory agency may change.

Success, then, for the corporate project leader, means not only planning and executing a set of project tasks, but also satisfying all the requirements imposed by the business environment.

Success for senior management means being able to have confidence that projects are in compliance, that they know exactly what state each project is in at all times, and that decisions are being requested and rendered efficiently.

In Project Gateway 6 we have created a way to merge the business process requirements into the project execution so as to provide the project leader with process direction and corporate management with project accountability.

We call this "Project Process Management." It is a brand new layer of automation above the project workplan that directs and assists the project leader in fulfilling the business requirements.

It consists of two parts, tools for process definition and an automated mechanism for process operations.

### **Process Definition**

A process is defined as a series of approvals. Each approval can have preconditions which may involve the availability of project work products and other approvals.

The system also provides for approvals that depend upon the project status and also for those that are required periodically. For example, if the project has a large number of risks, a monthly signoff from the program office might be required. Once the risk situation has returned to normal, the system would no longer demand the approvals.

There can be many processes defined (General Management, Financial, Regulatory, Quality, SOX etc.). You do not need to create a complex master process. Rather, you create as many separate processes as you need, and then just assign them in combination for the project at hand.

### **Process Implementation**

For each project, there may be one or more required processes. The "process list" can be set at the program level so that all projects are automatically assigned the required processes with no action required on the part of the project leader.

The system dynamically combines all of the listed processes to create a single integrated process requirements schedule for that project. This schedule can be displayed as a Process Gantt chart. The required process events will also appear on the project and program calendars.

If any of the process definitions are changed, the effective schedule for all of the affected projects will change automatically.

If project conditions change, those approvals that have been defined as conditional may be added or removed from the process schedule. For example, one of your processes may specify that projects that are running late may be required to obtain a monthly approval from the customer. These approval requirements will appear or disappear in the process schedule as the projected finish date of the project changes.

The Project Gateway system periodically evaluates what actions are required for compliance, and sends instructions to the project leader telling them what they need to do to meet the requirements. When an approval is required and permitted, the project leader is directed to create a "signoff request" document. Submitting this request triggers an automated workflow process to obtain the approvals from the designated authorities. Note that project leaders cannot request approvals that have process preconditions unless those preconditions have been met and that only a project leader can request an approval for their project.

The system maintains a table in the project profile showing the approvals as they are obtained. And each approval request document is retained in the database. These documents contain the details of the approval and the authenticated names and dates of the approvers. If an approved request document is modified or deleted, the approval must be obtained again. Each approval will be included in the project log in its chronological sequence.

A failure to comply with the process results in both dashboard indications and messages to the program managers. In some cases, it can prevent work from being recorded against the project or prevent the project from being marked as completed.

Process compliance is enforced through the use of schedule interlocks, dashboard indicators, and program management notifications. Management can be sure that all projects will follow the proscribed processes. Process reports allow managers to review compliance and to compare process performance across projects.

The project "stage" is controlled by the approval process. As specific approvals are granted, the stage will change. For example, a project in the "Funded" stage will likely have more success in getting commitments from resource managers than one in the "Proposed" stage. Stage naming provides a shorthand for classifying projects that communicates the real meaning of key approvals.

The process system can function for all kinds of projects, from the simplest to the most complex. A task based work plan is not even required. The more sophisticated project leader can tie the individual project schedule into the process plan, and can adjust the dates (but not the requirements) of the future process steps to match the schedule of project work.

Project milestones can be interlocked with process approvals so that the project Gantt charts show the key process approvals as completed or not completed milestones.

### **Summary**

The Project Gateway Project Process Management facility provides management discipline for your project portfolio and an efficient real world project operations environment.