Quality Planning
Is It Really Worth It?

By Bruce Beer, PMP

Introduction

OK, so most project managers who have attended any type of project management class will have had "quality" thrown at them with the outline of what should go into a "quality plan." Unfortunately, knowing about the theoretical contents of a quality plan and actually preparing one can be quite different!

Combating the Challenges of Quality Planning

When I first tried to do a plan, my first question was, "Where can I find one that has already been done so I can use it as a starting point?" and the answer was generally a blank stare.

They were difficult things to get hold of because most people know about them, know what should go into them, but have never quite managed the final step of trying to produce one. Once the realization has hit you that these things are as rare as rocking horse droppings, you then need to go and create a plan based on the theory you learned in your last project management class.

> *The bridge between theory and practice in quality planning can be daunting.*

Later on in my project management career, I was working in a very large project management office (PMO) based in Germany, and I was asked to become the quality manager for a global desktop refresh rollout – another level of mystery altogether!

I worked with the customer's quality manager to produce a unified quality plan for the PMO and introduce quality measures into the program. It was daunting stuff!

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The client's quality manager and I sat down to outline the quality elements that would go into the quality plan. Bear in mind that the quality plan is there to define what quality measures there should be; what measurements need to be taken; when, how, how often, by whom, what format the results should take; and what constitutes the pot of gold under the rainbow that is "achieving quality."

The program was extremely diverse, incorporating areas such as some software development, some facility reconstruction, purchasing, delivery of desktops around the world, installation, support, SLAs, etc., and the quality plan had to account for all these different types of projects.

In creating the quality plan we focused on the project deliverables. This is where we could apply quality metrics, success criteria, acceptance, etc. Viewing it from this deliverables aspect also allowed us to break the plan down into the different types of projects and deliverables, defining quality metrics and success criteria for each.

What Is the Overall Objective of a Quality Plan?

This is an important but illusive topic. I would say that a complete and effective quality plan includes answers to all of the following:

- How we intend to meet the project quality objectives (quality plan);
- How we can identify variances (quality control); and
- How we act on those variances (quality assurance) to implement any corrective measures required.

The plan would normally have a "general" section that describes the quality methodology, the company's overview on quality (i.e., their quality policy), maybe quality requirements in the specific marketplace in which the project will operate and possibly how to ensure quality during subsequent operation, if applicable. Some of the basic elements might include quality metrics, success criteria, quality checklists, and tools to be used across the organization.

Your quality plan should contain specific details of everything you need to know to achieve consistency across your organization.

For example, if you are creating the quality plan for a program, you may want to specify what tools should be used, such as Microsoft Office version xxxx.

We have probably all experienced the frustration of having a Word document sent to us from someone who is using a later version and being unable to read it. Similarly, using Microsoft Project across a program should have everyone using the same release to ensure data can be communicated and read by all on the program.

Where you have many servers around the globe, it might be quite a good idea to have them all on the same operating system, with the same version or release number, and patch level etc.

Conclusion

An effective quality plan will be a good baseline for consistently attaining the best possible quality on your project.

I would say that a quality plan should be considered for every project. The size and complexity of the plan would depend on the size and complexity of the project; but in minimal terms, it should identify the deliverables to be produced, metrics to be measured for each deliverable, the overall quality policy, the tools to be used, and how to report and handle variances.

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About the Author

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