

Three Simple Questions¹

Anil Seth

Don't refuse to go on an occasional wild-goose chase; that is what wild geese are made for.

~Henry S. Haskins

We found the recent writeup by Christopher Cook fascinating and a good read. It is about finding the purpose of your project with three simple questions, and these are:

- A. What did you want to do when you were a child before anybody told you what you were supposed to do?
- B. What was it you wanted to become?
- C. What did you want to do more than anything else?

A project manager, I doubt that was your answer. Christopher's article explores on refocusing our attention on the project for a better understanding of why we are willing to go through the daily struggles. The late-night phone calls and early morning emails do not seem so bad when the objective is clear. When the situation gets murky, that is when things get complicated. Quitting becomes real rather than a threat. These three questions (What did you want to do when you were a child before anybody told you what you were supposed to do? What was it you wanted to become? and What did you want to do more than anything else?) help us shift that negativity back towards the purpose. When the purpose is clear, the work becomes the reward...Find your project purpose!

From here the conflict starts between the desires and function.

Let's take this conflict forward in the project execution.

In one of our management meeting, advice was sought on managing the conflict of late vendor data or late changes by the Client etc. The discussion led to formulation of following strategies:

- (1) Project Execution Strategy (PES) prepared in proposal is to be explained to the team at the start of the Project.
- (2) Client review requirements to be addressed during Project setup phase and schedule to be aligned accordingly.

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(3) Know Your Client and review Client requirements wrt Project at the time of Project Set up. Know your client strategy to be included by Sales/Proposal Manager in PES during Proposal.

(4) Project to start with Control Budget planning (management of absolute budget to be accounted for during setup). The difference in control and absolute budget is to account for staffing escalation or subject matter expert (SME) support for specific activity.

(5) Use of available Vendor Data and Automation to be encouraged during setup phase. For example, this to include early meetings on usage of seed file for Smart Plant set ups and available automation tools to reduce vendor data impact.

(6) Tail end mind set and know your client endorsement– Absolute communication hierarchy is to be followed. This helps in managing performance factor(pf) of the team around 1.0.

The conflict in execution is at times related to Client demand, we will not discuss whether the demand is as per work assigned or a wish list. That will be addressed in future articles, the main challenge is to empower the consultant's team during set up and it is found that the following early alignment strategies with the Client generally works (keeping the wish list parked). To enable a constructive discussion, proposed agenda to be circulated in advance to the meeting and to meet the project demands following information and documents are expected to be provided on or before kick-off meeting:

1. Client will make available appropriate personnel from their side to interface with the Fluor.
2. An interface matrix will be utilized for communication between Client and Consultant.
3. A communication plan will be utilized between Consultant and Client.
4. A monthly project progress report will be provided to Client. A monthly face to face progress review meeting will be scheduled as deemed required at Consultant's office
5. Regular Weekly teleconferences will be scheduled between Consultant and Client to review the key-issues on the project. An action items list will be established to facilitate the review.
6. Consultant will organize milestone reviews consistent with their standard work practices during monthly reviews. The design reviews will be held in the Consultant's office. Some of the reviews, if required can be conducted through videoconference.
7. Consultant will have a document management coordinator to facilitate issue of documents. A document distribution matrix will be established that will include distribution to Client's key personnel. Documents will be issued in portable format.
8. Consultant's document numbering system will be implemented. Equipment and Instrument Tag numbering will be provided by Client to make it consistent with existing numbering system, which will help the Client operations team.

9. Client's comments if any on Consultant's issued documents will be provided in writing in maximum 5 working days from the date of issue of the document.
10. Consultant will establish a change management procedure to facilitate efficient development of design.
11. All Consultant's deliverables will be developed in English (or Project's agreement language).

And following general assumptions often helps in avoiding execution conflicts:

1. Native files of all feed documents to be available during execution, these to be used as-is or as a starting point for detail design.
2. Site visit to identify requirements for all tie-ins and get all the detail from Client.
3. Collection of any drawings/ documents from Client for existing units will be available during execution.
4. Design Basis, Process Description is by PMC and update by the contractor.
5. PMC's Legends, specifications to be followed.
6. Standard template for Operating Manual is by Client.
7. Any specialised study if required later post award shall be performed after mutual agreement.
8. Maximum three Bidders are to be considered for bid evaluation
9. Tie in point numbers assumed in the areas
10. Tie-in information (Coordinates, Photographs, existing doc markups, support locations) to be provided by Client at the start of the project.
11. 3D modelling in Brown field to be updated on the existing model provided by client.
12. All Specifications required on the project required from the client.

The basic question is, why conflict arises? Let's go back to the three questions:

1. What did you want to do when you were a child before anybody told you what you were supposed to do?
2. What was it you wanted to become?
3. What did you want to do more than anything else?

Our understanding is, we want to be successful whatsoever our wish was i.e., be it Astronaut, Teacher, Politician or Musician.

Picking back again from the Cook:

A \$1 product that positively impacts 1 million people is a success. Some project managers focus only on the bottom line. They make moves based solely on dollars and cents. Others prefer to manage people putting together teams that work well together despite being more expensive. The environment created around a project impacts the success as well.

The mantra to be successful and having manageable conflicts is to have aligned and happy faces throughout the project stages. Cook is right, these three questions help us to shift the negativity back towards the purpose. When the purpose is clear, the work becomes rewarding. You all may still insist that the conflicts will remain as conflict and project execution go hand in hand. This needs to be seen with the eyes of Change Management and it is recommended you go through Gap Analysis and Cause & Effect Analysis by Jeff Oltmann (PM World Journal Vol. XI, Issue VI – June 2022), the fishbone in the end of the article is useful and you will find almost all familiar words in this.

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether this happens at 20 or at 80. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young, but becomes constantly more valuable, regardless of physical capacity.

~Henry Ford, 1929

About the Author



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Mr. Anil Seth is working as Project Manager in Fluor's India office at Gurugram. Fluor Daniel India Private Limited (Fluor India) provides a full range of engineering, design, procurement, and construction management services to Indian and overseas Clients. Fluor India is an established quality provider of engineering, procurement, construction management (EPC) and project management services for Fluor's energy and chemicals, power, mining, and industrial projects, and is a key support office for Fluor facilities located in North America, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia Pacific

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