Program Management

I don't know about you, but it's a very rare day when I only have one project vying for my attention. As I'm writing this, I have about 10 other projects waiting on my desk. As employees, we have to get very good at prioritizing all our projects or we'd crumble under the stress of them all!
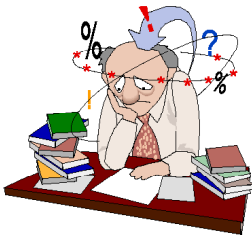
All organizations have to deal with this; however, some of them are lucky enough to have a program management team to help keep everyone organized. According to Project Management Institute (PMI®), a program is a "group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually". PMI® goes on to define program management as "the centralized coordinated management of a program to achieve the program's strategic benefits and objectives."

Program Management is very different from Project Management. During a program's life cycle, projects are initiated, and the program manager oversees and provides direction and guidance to the project managers. Program managers coordinate efforts between projects, however, they do not manage them. They are responsible for identification, rationalization, monitoring, and control of the interdependencies between projects. They must deal with the escalated issues among the projects that comprise the program and tracking the contribution of each project.

Program Management has three themes: benefits management, program stakeholder management, and program governance. Let's take a quick look into each of these.

Benefits Management
Benefits Management deals with the tangible (quantifiable, ie. financial objectives) and the intangible (improved employee morale or customer satisfaction) benefits a program is intended to deliver. It begins in the early phases of a program's life cycle and assesses the value and organizational impact of the program. It assigns responsibilities and accountability for the actual benefits required from the program.

It also includes a Benefits Realization Plan. In this plan, definitions of each benefit and how it is to be realized are outlined. It maps the benefits to program outcomes and the metrics and procedures to measure benefits. It also includes the transition plan of the program into ongoing operations and benefit sustainment

Program Stakeholder Management
Program stakeholder management defines program stakeholders as individuals and organizations whose

Work hard. There is no short cut.
Alfred P. Sloan, Jr (1875-1966)
Business leader and philanthropist

The Mathis Group's
Messenger

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interests may be affected by the program outcomes. It identifies how the program will affect stakeholder's organizational culture and examines the resistance or barriers to change. These stakeholders may be internal or external and can influence positively or negatively. A few key program stakeholders include:

- Program Director
- Program Manager
- Project Manager
- Customer
- Program Management Office

Additional stakeholders may include:

- Suppliers
- Governmental Regulatory Agencies
- Competitors
- Potential Customers

A stakeholder management plan, combined with a communication plan, should deliver accurate, consistent, and timely information that reaches all relevant stakeholders.

Program Governance
Program governance is the process of developing, communicating, implementing, monitoring, and assuring the policies, procedures, organizational structures, and practices associated with a program. It's concerned with controlling the organization's investment, as well as monitoring the delivery of benefits as the program progresses. This control is achieved by monitoring progress reports and reviews on a routine basis and at each phase in the program's life cycle.

Having a resource such as a Program Management Office can be very beneficial to an organization to help monitor and control the various projects on which it is working. Even if your company doesn't have a Program Management Office, you can still do your part to keep your projects organized and completed on time.