A Team’s Lack Of Creativity

Karen Goold has worked in leadership and coaching roles for over 20 years, within the Financial Services industry and with blue chip/FMCG companies, and now uses that extensive customer-focused knowledge, combined with being a practitioner in Applied Neuroscience, NLP and the MBTI, to provide client-specific coaching through Assiem Ltd. Go to assiem.co.uk for more information on executive coaching available.

When you’re asked to brainstorm some new ideas, who do you invite to the meeting? Are you inviting like-minded individuals, those you may have worked with before or you seem to get along with?

This may seem like a good idea, but you could be missing out on some vital thought processes and opinions. For instance, you could be only inviting those in your inner circle (also known as in-group) - those you personally trust, respect and who you believe are good at their job. It’s your personal opinion, but that doesn’t actually mean that they can’t be trusted, respected or aren’t good at their job. Known as a cognitive bias (an unconscious “rule of thumb” we use to help us short-cut our decision making process), there is a risk that this could very easily reduce the creative ability of your group.

If we want to generate new and unusual solutions for problems, we want to move away from the known and recognized, and encourage flexibility and novelty of ideas. Making the most of a diverse group of contributors, who will challenge the “norm”, will help towards this.

Additionally, when you’re facilitating the meeting, it’s worth being aware of another bias we have - group-think. This is a pressure to conform to a group decision, rather than being encouraged to highlight and act on our own individual experience and ideas.

This can be especially prevalent if you’ve also only got your inner circle in the meeting. As an example, group-think can appear obvious when there are new-comers to the team who others may see as irrational or too different (not fitting in with the culture). Ultimately it can often be the cause of some decisions that have ended up being extremely risky ones to have taken because it’s lacked any real challenge.

It can be tricky to facilitate a meeting that includes the full spectrum from what may at first appear as wacky ideas to realistic facts and figures. I’ve been in meetings where those with unusual ideas have complained about being demotivated by questions on practicalities, and those that require fact-based reasoning have thought new concepts are beyond achievable. However, if all team members feel safe to contribute and understand that conversations are actively expected to include this array of ideas, then innovation can be fun.

When looking to encourage creativity in a meeting, a confident leader will not be trying to ensure everyone gets along, allow a group or individual to dominate, or want to compromise on ideas. They will be looking to encourage a healthy debate and respect for all involved, whilst ultimately thinking outside of that box.

“The Critical Path”
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Welcome back. I hope all of you had great summer. We are about to kick start our 2015-2016 session on 15th September with our guest Speaker Frank Saladis and the topic is “The Indispensable Project Manager”. We will take this opportunity to all of members and our friends from APICS, Tappan Zee chapter and ISM - 7 counties to our September Chapter meeting. We have planned a great series of speakers for future chapter meetings till the end of year.

There are few major changes happening in strategic direction from PMI.

New PMP exam on Jan 2016

A recently completed Role Delineation Study (RDS) provided an updated description of the project management professional role. Research included a large-scale survey of global Project Management Professional (PMP) certification holders to validate updates to domains, tasks, knowledge, and skills. The RDS captures perspectives of project management practitioners from all industries, work settings, and regions. It serves as the foundation for the PMP exam and ensures its validity and relevance. The five domains of practice for the PMP remain the same. However, tasks within each domain have been modified, added, or removed. We recommend our non-PMPs certified members to take advantage of the class offered by our instructors to get this most important industry recognized certification for project managers before the exam changes.

Changes to the CCR program

PMI certifications provide us a competitive advantage like no other. They include an ongoing professional development plan that provides the prescriptive direction PMs need to stay relevant in a continually evolving global business environment. We, as certified practitioners, need to be able to deliver consistent, reliable, repeatable and scalable results. The CCR Program was designed to help PMs grow and develop with the profession. As the global business environment and project management profession evolves, the program must adapt to provide development of new employer-desired skills. Adding the leadership and strategic business management competencies to our CCR requirements supports us in continuing to be the solution that our employers are desperately seeking. Employers need project practitioners with leadership and business intelligence skills to support long-range strategic objectives that contribute to the bottom line. We are also incorporating changes to our programs and PDD to stay in sync with these changes. We will keep you informed as we learn more about all this.

See you at this month’s chapter meeting

Pawan Kumar, PMP
President
PMI Westchester
3 Reasons to Get Better at Delegating

Henry Lopez has over 34 years of diverse business experience, including successful careers in the information technology industry, sales, sales training and business ownership. In addition to Levante Business Group, he is also currently co-owner of iTopIt (a self-serve frozen yogurt restaurant with two locations in Colorado Springs), and L3 Destinations.

The growth and success of your business, not to mention your health and happiness, depends to a great extent on your ability to delegate effectively and consistently. Delegating frees you up to focus on what’s most important, what you are best at, and to spend time away from your business. It also utilizes the strengths of your team and their unique abilities, builds a stronger organization.

Why is it that we hesitate to delegate and why are we often so poor at it? Perhaps it’s because we think we can do it better than anyone else. Most small business owners are obsessed about control, and have had to do it all themselves at some point to get to where they are today. You understand best what you want and the results you are looking for, and the truth is, sometimes you are the “best” at it. But to grow and have time to enjoy your life, you must learn to delegate effectively.

Perfectionism is also partly to blame for undermining our ability to delegate. Delegating also takes time, energy, effort and a process to do it effectively. Always remember that it’s a process. Be prepared for and expect that you will not always be successful on your first attempts at delegating.

Refusing to delegate to your team members can lead to frustration, confusion, and often fails in the end because you never find the time to complete the task yourself. Nothing gets done because you are waiting until you can do it “perfectly”. Instead, you should try to focus on the “good enough” (80% rule), and continue improving your delegation skills.

Here are three reasons why you need to get better at delegating.

1. Get more done in less time.

By delegating certain tasks and projects, you can focus on what’s most important and what you are best at. Initially it may take more time to delegate, but as you get better at it and you implement and execute a system, you will begin to reap the rewards. Your team also needs to learn how to own these delegated assignments, but once they understand the system then they are free to add their value to the task and to help you grow your business.

Focusing on where you add the most value and delegating to others means you have more time off from the business. That time off in turn keeps you energized and focused on managing and growing your business.

TIP: There are three types of tasks to consider delegating: things you don’t like to do, what you are not good at, and tasks that don’t move your business forward or are not strategic.

2. Leverage the skills, strengths and great ideas of others.

One of the big benefits of delegating effectively is that you get great ideas and input from those to whom you delegate. We may think we are the only ones who can get something done perfectly, but the truth is that if you have a competent team of people they will come up with ideas and approaches to solving a problem you may never have thought of. If you have not built a strong complimentary team of employees, consultants, or utilizing crowd sourcing, then you are limiting your growth by not fully leveraging them and their unique ideas.

3. Develop your team.

Delegation is perhaps one of the most important business leadership skills and you should strive to get better at it every day. When done correctly, it saves you time and develops and fully leverages your team. Through delegation of not just menial administrative tasks, but important and meaningful tasks and projects, you can teach your team members new skills and give them the opportunity to develop themselves and achieve their personal goals as well as those of the company. A good team should be eager for these challenges and for an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and talents.

If you want to continue being frustrated with too much work and not enough growth, then by all means, keep trying to do it all yourself. If you want to do great things and grow your business, however, then learn to delegate effectively. As with any other skill, it takes dedicated effort, patience and a system to make significant improvements and reap the benefits.

Now ask yourself these couple of questions:

a. What are the real reasons why I am not good at delegating?

b. What tasks can I consider delegating today?
No PowerPoint Slides? How Can I Communicate?

Elizabeth Larson, PMP, CBAP, CSM, PMI-PBA is Co-Principal and CEO of Watermark Learning and has over 30 years of experience in project management and business analysis. Elizabeth’s speaking history includes repeat presentations for national and international conferences on five continents.

Richard Larson, PMP, CBAP, PMI-PBA, President and Founder of Watermark Learning, is a successful entrepreneur with over 30 years of experience in business analysis, project management, training, and consulting. He has presented workshops and seminars on business analysis and project management topics to over 10,000 participants on five different continents.

Recently we attended a Small Business Leaders conference in Washington, DC. Our speakers included US senators, cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries, under-undersecretaries, and a few associate assistant deputies thrown in for good measure. It wasn’t until one of these associate assistants told us that we were his first group not to be treated to a PowerPoint slide show that we realized that there had not been one PowerPoint slide in two days—no slides, not one bullet point or photo, no multi-media—just words. To be sure, some of the speakers referred to their notes from time to time, but these were people all knowledgeable about issues confronting small businesses in the United States.

At this point we could make jokes about politicians being too wordy, or government technology being old and broken so they had to rely on old-fashioned notes on index cards, but we had just spent two days talking, in part, about the latest technical advancements. So when the speaker alluded to the lack of PowerPoint slides, we realized in the first place that not one of the speakers had used slides, and in the second that as far as we knew no one missed them.

These speakers talked to us about what they knew, often with humor, always with enthusiasm and earnestness. There were no gimmicks, no extraordinary efforts to be entertaining—just an understanding that we wanted them to share their knowledge, and they, in turn, wanted to learn about the issues that affected us. To put things in perspective, all the presentations were short, with most 15 minutes or less.

Don’t get us wrong--there is nothing wrong with PowerPoint slides, Prezi, or other presentation tools. They help keep us and our audience focused on the session objectives. However, such tools, when improperly used, can also stifle creativity and limit discussion. When we rely on such tools as the primary communication vehicle, we run the risk of telling too much and learning too little.

For those of us who facilitate meetings, give presentations, act as mentors and consultants, or train others, to be effective we need to be prepared to address the topics of interest to our audience. We need to make sure that participants participate, and we need to leave time for participant interaction and questions. Let’s look at each one of these in more detail.

Prepare to address topics of interest to our audience. It was clear to those of us at the Small Business conference that most of the speakers prepared (or their staff had) enough to know some of the big topics facing the audience and were able to weave their messages into our issues.

As a project manager that is not always the case. For example, Elizabeth “ran” many meetings with business stakeholders. She says, “I often had an agenda that I felt needed to be completed. I knew what I wanted to get from these stakeholders, and I drove towards that end. Because I was focused on what I needed for the project and not what the stakeholders needed for their end product, the meetings did not always go well.” Preparing means spending the time to talk to stakeholders in advance of a meeting to find out the topics of interest to the participants. We may discover issues that would take the project in unexpected directions. It does not mean that we have to act on all these diversions, but we do need to ensure that our participants feel that they are heard. We need to bring these topics to our sponsors and business owners and let the participants know that we have done so. Parking lots (topics to be discussed at a later time) are often a useful way to capture these digressions, not only during meetings but our prep work as well.

Help participants participate. We found it interesting that there was a great deal of discussion with the conference attendees. This discussion was often lively but took place in a respectful, encouraging environment. Of course creating that kind of environment is not always easy. There are many things we can do to discourage participation in meetings and workshops. For example, when we go into a meeting with a list of ground rules and view our job as enforcers of these ground rules, we discourage participation. When we require “only one voice at a time,” or dictate that a participant raise their hand before speaking, we can pretty well guarantee that participants will at best forget what they wanted to say or worse yet, shut down. Some of the latest meeting and workshop trends include providing participants with stickies to jot down their ideas as they think of them, setting up easel pads around the room so participants can jot down their ideas at any time, encouraging participants to get up and write or create a visual design on a whiteboard, and when meeting virtually, devising creative ways to ensure that all voices are heard.

(continued on page 7)
As easy as it seems to keep a well-planned project on-track, it isn’t! In working with hundreds of project teams over the course of my career, I’ve found that projects do not fail in formulation; they fail in execution. The best results follow those projects that are well-managed and kept on-track. Results are not just substantial in terms of monetary gain, but are also important to customer satisfaction and loyalty. In today’s Amazon-impacted marketplace, a leg up on the competition can be a vital competitive strategy. What are you doing to ensure success?

There are several powerful strategies to keeping a project on track. Some of the most impactful are as follows:

1. It starts at the top: As with success overall, keeping your project on track starts at the top. Leaders can make or break success. Thus, selecting the best project manager is key to success. Of course, it is beneficial also to have the best project sponsors and executive support; however, the 80/20 of success is putting the right leader in place.

2. Put time in upfront to understand the project plan: Although it is a common desire to jump into the project and start performing tasks, it is significantly more successful to take the time to develop a strong project plan. Make sure to coordinate with all relevant parties and incorporate input. Ask questions and consider potential issues. Be clear on your plan, and results will follow.

3. Focus on the critical path: One of the secrets to success relates to focusing exclusively on the critical path. It is easy to get deterred on all the project plan tasks as they all seem important; however, the most successful projects consider the 80/20 as the critical path. In essence, the focus is on the tasks that are most likely to hold up the project from progressing at the optimal pace and those which are likely to impact whether results occur.

4. Follow up with task owners: Following up with task owners can ensure success. I’ve found that a quick check in with task owners to remind them of upcoming tasks, especially critical path tasks, can be invaluable to making sure the owner is prepared to start on time and that they have the resources available to successfully complete the task. Ask if there are any concerns and work to address them prior to the start date.

5. Embrace project supporters: Whether a project sponsor or a peer to the project team, project supporters are integral to project success. Identify project supporters and keep them in the loop. Make sure to provide information so that they understand how they help to contribute to the project success. Make it easy for them to support your project.

6. Celebrate successes: An important part of any project is to celebrate small wins along the way. Don’t wait for the project to be completed to celebrate success. Success breeds success. Find people doing right. Look for indicators that the project is moving in the right direction. Recognize the progress and celebrate the contributions of the team.

7. Simplify: Complex project plans do not deliver success. Contrary to popular opinion, I’ve found that more often than not, success stems from simplification. Simplify to the tasks required to deliver your end result. Avoid complexity. It will become easier for the team to understand and execute.

8. Monitor metrics: Do not wait until the end to evaluate project success. Identify milestones. Keep an eye out for critical path milestones. Monitor progress towards these milestones. For the critical milestones, develop interim checkpoints so that you can monitor progress along the way. That way, you’ll have the opportunity to adjust as needed.

9. Don’t take your eye off the prize - results: Although it is easy to get caught up in a maze of tasks and to-do’s, don’t take your eyes off of your desired end results. Keep them in mind and focus on those actions that will contribute specifically towards delivering end results.

10. Communicate, communicate and communicate: Just as in real estate where location, location and location are the three most important attributes of a new house, communicate, communicate and communicate are the three most important attributes in keeping your project on track. If all team members, supporters, sponsors and other related parties are not aligned, the project is likely to veer off track.

Since executives count on projects to deliver the vast majority of improvements to company performance (such as growing the business, increasing margins, and accelerating cash flow), keeping the project on track is essential. Those who follow these ten strategies will succeed significantly more often than those who don’t. Why take a chance on what’s vital to business success?
Harnessing the Power of Conflict

Kiron D. Bondale, PMP, PMI-RMP has managed multiple mid-to-large-sized technology and change management projects, and has worked in both internal and professional services project management capacities. He has setup and managed Project Management Offices (PMO) and has provided project portfolio management and project management consulting services to clients across multiple industries.

Few of us enjoy dealing with conflict.

But shying away from conflict doesn’t work – you’ll get mediocre results from a team who focuses more on being nice than making progress, or worse, your better team members will become disengaged and actively seek new roles.

So what are some clues to alert you that you may need to step in to catalyze the chemical reaction?

Pay close attention to people’s body language. If you are frequently witnessing a mismatch between what people are saying and how they are acting, that might indicate that they are really not in favor of a direction.

If the drive to maintain team harmony appears to trump all others, that may need to be called out. A symptom of this is whenever any discussion starts to become lively, a number of team members suggest that it be taken offline (which never happens), or some other type of interference occurs to interrupt the progression of the conflict.

On the other hand, unhealthy conflict is evidenced by a greater focus on personalities and positions rather than the underlying issue.

If you start witnessing attacks on individual team members or if you notice a growing reluctance to participate in team discussions or withdrawing symptoms from certain team members, it could mean that conflicts are beginning to become too personal and need to be re-focused.

Of course, picking up on signs of poor conflict requires you to be sufficiently self-aware – it can be difficult to identify the behaviors of your team members if you are exhibiting the same behaviors yourself.

While it is an essential ingredient when forging healthy, productive teams, conflict can feel like making nitroglycerine – you need it to make a bomb, but let the process get away from you, and you are likely to bear the brunt of the failure.

No PowerPoint Slides? How Can I Communicate? (continued)

In our experience, agendas are generally too tightly packed. We try to cover more than is possible because we know that the stakeholders’ time is limited. Moreover, when the agenda is presented on a PowerPoint slide, it can give the impression of being unchangeable. This formality increases the risk of trying to cover too much in too short a time and decreases the chance that participants will interact with each other.

It is important for all meetings, and particularly when stakeholders are participating virtually, that all of us take the time to get to know each other. This is even more important when we are planning a series of meetings with the same stakeholders. It is equally important to remember that regardless of the topic or the nature of the meeting, each participant is important and will have questions. We need to learn from the participants, and the best way to do that is by encouraging their questions. Sure, some stakeholders will ask questions that are not directly related to the topic at hand, while others will “grandstand.” Even though their “questions” will be opinions and statements rather than questions, we need to provide an environment and the necessary time where everyone is heard.

Some of the speakers at the Small Business Leaders conference freely admitted that our issues were outside their domain of expertise or authority. Others refocused the group on the conference objectives. But in each instance we felt that we were in a safe environment and were taken seriously. We need to do the same in project meetings.
Chapter Meeting – September 15, 2015 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Topic: The Indispensable PM

Managing projects effectively has become essential in every organization large or small. The uncertainties of the world business economy, rapidly changing technology, and the intensifying focus on sustainability has driven many organizations to develop specific methods for managing projects and to seek highly qualified people to manage those projects. Today’s project managers must adapt to change, lead diverse teams, act as ambassadors for their organizations and deal with a multitude of challenging project stakeholders.

Featured Speaker: Frank P. Saladis, PMP

Frank Saladis is a senior consultant and trainer in the field of professional project management. He is an accomplished leader in project management and the author of 10 published books and over 150 project management articles. Frank has entertained countless world wide audiences and brings his special form of humor that injects an element of enjoyment and fun as he shares his knowledge and passion for project management.

Frank is a Project Management Professional, holds a Masters Certificate in Commercial Project management from George Washington University, is a graduate from the PMI Leadership Institute Masters Class, and has been very involved with the Project Management Institute since 1991. He is currently the president of the New York City PMI chapter and past chair of the PMI Ed SIG and has held many other PMI leadership positions. Frank was recognized as PMI’s person of the year in 2006 and was awarded the distinction of PMI Fellow in October 2013.

Location

The Royal Palace Restaurant
77 Knollwood Road, White Plains / Greenburgh, NY 10607
(at the south end of the Greenburgh Shopping Plaza)
Phone: 914.289.1988

Agenda

6:00 | Registration, Networking & Dinner
6:45 | Announcements, Introduction of Program
7:00 | Guest Speaker or Internal Program (1 PDU)
8:00 | Participants network
8:15 | SIG programs; PMO, Quality (1 PDU)

Fees

Chapter members – $20
Non-members – $30
We accept cash or checks. Sorry, no credit card

Directions:

From I-287

• Take I-287 to exit 4.
• At the end of the exit ramp turn SOUTH and go 6/10 of a mile to the traffic light at Stadium Road (sign may not be visible).
• Turn LEFT onto Stadium, go 50 yards, then RIGHT into the unused end of the plaza parking lot.
• Go to the far right hand corner of the lot where it connects to the part with the stores. Pass the stores and the movie theater on your left until you come to the Royal Palace.

Map to Royal Palace Restaurant
**September 2015 Breakfast Roundtable Meeting**

**Topic:** Pivot Table and Slicers -- *(This is a REMOTE ONLY Breakfast Roundtable! You must register one day in advance - e-mail tcsmithsr@verizon.net)*

**Facilitator:** Crystal Kennedy - Crystal Kennedy will be sharing her experience and tips on working in Excel on Pivot Table and Slicers.

**Date:** Tuesday, September 22nd – 7:45AM

**October 2015 Chapter Meeting**

**Topic:** TBD

**Date:** Tuesday, October 13, 2015

**Speaker:** TBD

**Location:** The Royal Palace, 77 Knollwood Road, Greenburgh Shopping Plaza, Greenburgh, NY

**October 2015 Breakfast Roundtable Meeting**

**Topic:** Project Closeout -- *(This is a REMOTE ONLY Breakfast Roundtable! You must register one day in advance - e-mail tcsmithsr@verizon.net)*

**Facilitator:** Joanne Guerriero

**Date:** Tuesday, October 27th – 7:45AM

**COMING IN SPRING 2015 - PMP Exam Preparation Class**

The PMI Westchester Chapter is pleased to announce another PMP Exam Preparation course with instructor John Sherlock, who will assist the PMP Certification candidate in preparing for the PMP Exam. This course will be offered on the Westchester campus of Iona College in New Rochelle, NY.

**Instructor:** John Sherlock, MS, MBA, PMP - John Sherlock is an accomplished and credentialed Project Management Professional with almost 40 years experience in the energy, financial, telecom and automotive industries. John is currently an Assistant Professor and Director of the Project Management Program in Hagan School of Business at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY; and until recently, an IT Program Manager with Volvo Cars of North America. John is a PMP, a Certified Six Sigma Black Belt, a Certified Six Sigma Instructor, a PMP Prep Instructor for the Westchester Chapter of PMI and also credentialed in the areas of software development, IT governance, risk, and audit.

**Date:** Saturdays, October 17th through November 14th

**Location:** Iona College Hagan School of Business, Room 101, 715 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY

**Fees:** $700 Westchester PMI Members and Other Chapter PMI Members; $800 non-members by Friday, October 2nd

**Late Registration after October 2nd:** $800 Westchester PMI members and Other Chapter PMI members; $900 non-members. Payments must be made by Paypal in advance or by check (payable to PMI Westchester)

**PMI Offers On Demand Free Webinars for Members**

If you are in need of PDUs and don't know where to find them, look no further. PMI members can access a library of webinars addressing project management trends, best practices, how-to-guidance, and much more — all available to help you make meaningful contributions to the projects you lead or work on.

You can choose from a variety of focus areas such as

- Agile
- Benefits Realization
- Career Management
- Change Management
- Communications
- Industry-specific
- Leadership
- New Practitioner
- Organizational Project Management
- Requirements Management
- Risk Management
- Scheduling

Just simply log into PMI.org and go to Learning, or click [http://www.pmi.org/learning/on-demand_webinars.aspx](http://www.pmi.org/learning/on-demand_webinars.aspx), and you can select from any number of free webinars, all while earning precious PDUs towards your recertification.

You have nothing to lose, only PDUs to gain. Happy Learning!!

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**The Critical Path**

The Critical Path is PMI Westchester’s free monthly newsletter, published as a service for members and non-members alike. We’re always looking for your contributions. To submit an article for publication, please contact the newsletter editor listed below:

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