

Forward, The NEW One-Page Project Manager

You have in your hands a book that is both a critical tool for, and a symbol of, our innovation economy.

Our 21st Century workplace is the scene of rapid, visible evolution. This rapid evolution means we are surrounded by projects. Some projects are huge, such as a new commercial airplane model. But the proliferation of projects is due more to an increase in small projects, such as implementing standardized processes in an operating room, a promotion campaign for a winery, or opening a new office for a growing business. There are many reasons the pace of change and the number of projects are increasing, but there is no doubt it is true, for the evidence is all around us.

Projects generate chaos. How could they not? The definition of a project is *work that has a beginning and end, and produces a unique product or service*. By their nature, every project has an element of discovery, doing something that hasn't been done exactly that way before. Every project is different than the last one. It's the opposite of the 20th Century focus on continuous process improvement - refining the way we manufacture a car or process a bank loan until we drive out all inefficiency and error. Managing a single project may not quite constitute chaos, but as projects proliferate we find ourselves juggling a collection of increasingly diverse tasks, goals, and resources.

The project-driven workplace emerged in the 1990's. In that one decade, the discipline of project management broke out of its construction- and defense-industry niche and spread throughout all organizations - for profit, non-profit, and government. With it came an explosion of training, methodology, software and certification; all directed toward gaining control over the ever-increasing complexity associated with managing more and more projects.

Our approach to manage the complexity of projects has become equally complex. Project Management Offices (PMO's) are staffed with expert project managers. Enterprise project management software attempts to systematize the juggling game; corralling our jumble of projects into a common framework and database. All of this effort and structure introduced to get our arms around this chaotic work has allowed us to juggle more and bigger projects.

Yet there have been two significant departures from this trend toward larger, more complex project management. The first, the Agile software development approach, broke the paradigm of rigidity and control because it became clear that increased structure both slowed projects down and degraded the quality and usefulness of the resulting software. Within a decade, the appeal of Agile transcended the software and information technology industries and is being used with other kinds of projects where discovery and rapid learning play major roles in project success. Agile does acknowledge the complexity of projects, but it addresses the complexity with principles and techniques that are designed to coexist with complexity rather than conquer it.

The second significant trend away from complex project management is described in this book, the One Page Project Manager, or OPPM. The OPPM also accepts that projects can be large and complex, but insists that to effectively manage them we must be able to distill the complexity to bring the major themes into focus. Using the OPPM we can simultaneously pay attention to several key dimensions of project performance, producing a sufficiently complete understanding to make good decisions.

How is it possible that we can manage a major project using the information formatted onto a single page? Even simple project management methodologies call for a half dozen separate documents. But that is the magic and the value of the OPPM. Project management is already a discipline populated by graphic techniques, because a picture is not only worth a thousand words, it may be the only way to truly synthesize and digest the meaning of those words. The OPPM takes synthesis and summary to a new level.

During twenty-plus years of teaching and consulting in the field of project management, my team at The Versatile Company has worked with many thousands of projects and project managers in industries as diverse as health care, education, aerospace, and government. Throughout this time I have prized the practical over the theoretical. I particularly attempt to focus on the minimum management overhead that produces the greatest productivity benefit, so it is natural for me to appreciate the OPPM. I am also naturally skeptical, so I was cautious embracing it. I've developed my own rules of thumb for evaluating a project and the minimums needed for effective management, and they are published as the Five Project Success Factors in my own popular book, *The Fast Forward MBA in Project Management*. I used the lens of the five factors to view the OPPM and was impressed that it contributed to every one of them.

1. *Agreement among the project team, customers, and management on the goals of the project.* The OPPM clearly and concisely states the project's goal at the top of the page, with sub-objectives listed on the left column. Together, these provide clarity to key stakeholders about the purpose and scope of the project.
2. *A plan that shows an overall path and clear responsibilities and that can be used to measure progress during the project.* This may be the OPPM's greatest strength - synthesizing and summarizing the details of the project plan and task status to provide a useful high-level understanding of the plan and our progress.
3. *A controlled scope.* Uncontrolled scope is the number one threat to on-time, on-budget performance. Uncontrolled scope means we allow additional tasks and objectives to be added to a project without consciously and formally accepting the related cost and schedule increases. Using the OPPM, it is clear what our major tasks are, when we will meet major schedule milestones, and how much we plan to spend. Changes that attempt to creep into the project will become visible in one or more of these dimensions quickly, providing notification to the project manager and the project's owners that they need to contain the change.
4. *Management support.* Every project needs support from management. Project managers and teams don't have sufficient authority to accomplish the project on their own. The age-old problem is getting busy executives to engage based upon accurate project information. This was the genesis of the OPPM: creating a single project dashboard that enables meaningful, informed involvement from managers with multiple projects under their span of control.
5. *Constant, effective communication among everyone involved in the project.* This is the essence of the OPPM.

Amazingly, the OPPM is the product of a very few executives and one in particular, Clark Campbell. Among all the other methods and techniques in the world of project management, it is nearly impossible to find one with a single inventor as most techniques evolved out of common usage across hundreds or thousands of projects. The clear exception is Henry Gantt, who introduced the now ubiquitous chart that bears his name literally a century ago. Like Gantt, Clark Campbell and his colleagues produced this new graphic for project reporting out of necessity and honed its design through use.



This new edition benefits from five years of feedback since its initial publication in 2007. Appropriately, it also includes a modified OPPM for Agile.

In our innovation economy characterized by rapid evolution and abundant projects, project management has taken on increased importance. It is also important to realize that we need both complex and simple approaches to managing projects. The OPPM does not replace the complex methods - Clark Campbell is clear about that. The OPPM creates an interface between the sophisticated, specialized skills of professional project managers and the many other project stakeholders whose expertise is needed for the project.

I congratulate Clark on his success pioneering this timely management and communication tool. It is well suited to the demands of leadership in these turbulent times.

Eric Verzuh, PMP

President, The Versatile Company,

www.VersatileCompany.com

Author, The Fast Forward MBA in Project Management, 4th ed., John Wiley & Sons, 2012