The Alpha Project
Managers
What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not
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Andy Crowe
PMP Exam

CAPM Exam

Alpha PMs
Project Management
"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."
“It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

Mark Twain
Baggage Transport System
• 4,000 sections comprising 26 miles of track
• Laser and photo cells to track movement
• 300 individual computers
• $193,000,000
• Recruited “top project manager”
“It looks like a complex cake, but in the end, it’s just flour, sugar, eggs, and butter.”
Baggage cars crashed
Suitcases were ruined and lost
Clothing strewn for miles
Completely unusable

And the impact on the new airport???
DELAYED OVER ONE YEAR!
DELAYED OVER ONE YEAR!
Costing the Taxpayers
$1,100,000 daily
The world’s “most advanced” baggage system was terminated in September, 2005
The world’s “most advanced” baggage system was terminated in September, 2005

Replaced with...
The world’s “most advanced” baggage system was terminated in September, 2005

Replaced with people!
Big Dig
Big Dig

Most expensive public works project in United States history
Big Dig

Most expensive public works project in United States history

• Leaks from the St. Charles River, eroding the tunnel
Big Dig

Most expensive public works project in United States history

- Leaks from the St. Charles River, eroding the tunnel
- Falling tiles causing death
Big Dig

Most expensive public works project in United States history

- Leaks from the St. Charles River, eroding the tunnel
- Falling tiles causing death
- 6 years late
Big Dig

Most expensive public works project in United States history

•Leaks from the St. Charles River, eroding the tunnel
•Falling tiles causing death
•6 years late
•$7,000,000,000+ over budget
Pop Quiz
"Considering the dire circumstances that we have in New Orleans, virtually a city that has been destroyed, things are going relatively well."
"Considering the dire circumstances that we have in New Orleans, virtually a city that has been destroyed, things are going relatively well."

(Former) FEMA Director Brown
FEMA receives an annual budget of over $6,600,000,000 (pre-September 11, 2001)
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Every FEMA project manager is required to be PMP certified.
Planning
Planning
Funding
Planning
Funding
Support
Planning
Funding
Support
Project Management
Planning
Funding
Support
Project Management

ALL FAILED
But what about “everyday projects?”
Price Waterhouse Coopers

2004 Study of 200 global companies large and small

Study represented 10,640 projects worth $5.6 billion
Price Waterhouse Coopers – 2004
Study of 200 global companies
large and small

OVER 50% OF THESE PROJECTS FAILED TOO!
Our tendency has been to focus on what is wrong.
The Alpha Study asked...
The Alpha Study asked...

Who is doing it right?
WHO GETS IT?
Practice.
Practice makes perfect.
Practice does not make perfect.
Practice does not make perfect.

Bad practice only reinforces bad habits.
Perfect practice makes perfect.
The Alpha Study
• Identified through survey and interviews of 860 project managers

• Only top 2% of the field as ranked by team, customer, senior management, and qualifying interviews were grouped as Alphas

• Non-Alphas comprised remaining 98%
What the stakeholders told us
8 Dimensions
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
- Communication
8 Dimensions
- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
- Approach and organization
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
- Approach and organization
- Focus and prioritization
8 Dimensions
- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
- Approach and organization
- Focus and prioritization
- Issue management
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
- Approach and organization
- Focus and prioritization
- Issue management
- Relationships and conflict
8 Dimensions

- Attitude and belief
- Communication
- Alignment
- Approach and organization
- Focus and prioritization
- Issue management
- Relationships and conflict
- Leadership
Let’s look at 4 of these
Attitude and Belief
Alphas generally believe they have the “enough authority to manage a project”
Alphas generally believe they have the “enough authority to manage a project”

Mark the degree with which you agree with the following statement:
“I have adequate authority to manage the projects for which I am responsible.”

Who was Surveyed
- Project Managers
- Customers
- Senior Management
- Team Members

By the Numbers
- Alpha average: 89%
- Non-Alphas average: 47%

860 Responses
(18 Alphas)
(842 non-Alphas)
But what about senior management?
Senior managers definitely believe their project managers have enough authority.
“Responsibility without authority!”
“No one is given authority. You just have to take it!”

—Tom Peters
Communication
Alpha project managers do not assume when it comes to communication
We asked 860 project managers “How effective are you at communication?”
We asked 860 project managers “How effective are you at communication?”

“How would you rank your overall communication effectiveness?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who was Surveyed</th>
<th>By the Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Managers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>Alphas 84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>Non-Alphas 82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Members</td>
<td>860 Responses</td>
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Then we asked their stakeholders...
Then we asked their stakeholders...

“How would you rank this project manager’s overall communication effectiveness?”

Who was Surveyed

- Project Managers
- Customers [✓]
- Senior Management [✓]
- Team Members [✓]

Average Alpha Stakeholder Ranking

Average Non-Alpha Stakeholder Ranking

By the Numbers

- Stakeholders of Alphas: 80%
- Stakeholders of Non-Alphas: 49%

1103 Responses

30 Alpha Stakeholders
1073 Non-Alpha Stakeholders
How do they do this?
They ask!
Alphas get to know their audiences and communicate appropriately.
Alphas get to know their audiences and communicate appropriately.

“Until the product is in the customer’s hands, communication is my deliverable.”

Victor (Alpha)
Alignment
Alphas know how their project aligns to their company’s strategy
“Is your primary project considered highly strategic to your organization (i.e., does it strongly contribute to the performing organization’s core strategic goals)?”

Who was Surveyed

- Project Managers
- Customers
- Senior Management
- Team Members

By the Numbers

- Alphas: 60.1%
- Non-Alphas: 41.4%

812 Responses
(18 Alphas)
(794 non-Alphas)
**Who was Surveyed**

- Project Managers (✓)
- Customers
- Senior Management (✓)
- Team Members

**By the Numbers**

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**“Is your primary project considered highly strategic to your organization (i.e., does it strongly contribute to the performing organization’s core strategic goals)?”**

**Who was Surveyed**

- Project Managers
- Customers
- Senior Management (✓)
- Team Members

**By the Numbers**

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<td>451 Responses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(18 managers of Alphas)</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(433 managers of non-Alphas)</td>
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**“Is this project manager’s primary project considered highly strategic to your organization (i.e., does it strongly contribute to your organization’s core strategic goals)?”**
70% of Alphas can articulate their organization’s stated strategic goals when asked
70% of Alphas can articulate their organization’s stated strategic goals when asked. Only 20% of non-Alphas can do the same.
70% of Alphas can articulate their organization’s stated strategic goals when asked. Only 20% of non-Alphas can do the same. Alphas know how their project aligns and contributes to those strategic goals.
Approach
Alphas allocate manpower differently on projects
- Alphas and non-Alphas rank the importance of planning roughly the same
- Alphas spend twice as much time on planning
- Among organizations that tracked overtime, Alphas logged 19% fewer overtime hours on projects than non-Alphas
What does it take to be an Alpha Project Manager?
Desire
Desire

Awareness of your gaps
Desire
Awareness of your gaps
Knowledge of the right way
Desire
Awareness of your gaps
Knowledge of the right way
Deliberate, perfect practice
Full details published October 31 in Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not.
Let’s Dialogue