

Simple Project Management Terms You Need to Know

Question:

Samoh, I have project team members that don't understand some of the basic terms around project management. Could you recommend a resource where I can go to find some basic project management definitions – things like clients, deliverables, programs, lifecycle, etc?

Matthew

Answer:

Matthew

I have been hearing a lot of that lately – team members that don't really know what they are doing. Actually I think what I am hearing about is project managers that don't know what they are doing, but project managers are team members as well, right?

It would be helpful if we could start a dictionary of project management terms. Based on most of the project managers I know, perhaps the better word for this resource would be “dorktionary”. Maybe we can start this project management resource right now. I don't even need to refer you to a reference. I will provide the definitions right here.

(The) **Client.** I Love that John Grisham book! You remember that part where the lawyer.....oh sorry, I won't ruin the ending for you. Let's just say that the “client is the person or group that is always nagging at you to do more work for the same budget. They are the direct beneficiary of a project or service and so they think they own you”. But seriously, you should read that book.

Deliverable. You know that thing you are building.....the one that your client and sponsor are always bugging you about? That's the deliverable. It refers to “any tangible outcome that is produced by a project”. “Tangible” is a fancy word. That is why I used the word “thing” previously. When many team members think of the main deliverable on a project they think of those late night pizzas, but that is “delivery” not “deliverable”. Let's just say the deliverable is the thingy that your project is building.

Lifecycle. You might think that a lifecycle is that stationary bicycle that you force yourself to ride. Well when you are talking about projects it has a different meaning. I could get all technical on you, but suffice it to say that the project lifecycle is “all the stuff you do to build the thingy”. That is why the lifecycle of a project is different depending on the thingy you are building. A long lifecycle means you are building a pretty complex thingy. A short lifecycle means less work.

Program. Just for fun I decided to check the real dictionary for this one. Low and behold there are a number of definitions for program. Let me show you what I found there:

1. A listing of the order of events and other pertinent information for a public presentation.
2. A scheduled radio or television show.
3. An ordered list of events to take place or procedures to be followed; a schedule: *a program of physical therapy for a convalescent.*

4. A system of services, opportunities, or projects, usually designed to meet a social need: “Working parents rely on the center's after-school latchkey program”.
5. A set of coded instructions that enables a machine, especially a computer, to perform a desired sequence of operations.

Unfortunately none of these is the correct definition of program for our dorktionary. For our purposes a program is “the structure established to manage a set of related projects to that are all delivering a common set of objectives”.

Program manager. The person running the program. Let me use it in a sentence – “*Hey I am a program manager. I’m cool and I am much more important than you.*”

You want more? Do any readers have other terms they would like to have defined in the project management dorktionary? Send them, on in to your friend Samoht.