

10

Managing Project Quality

Overview

This chapter aligns with chapter 8 of the PMBOK and 7% of the CAPM questions come from this knowledge area. The content connects to the Planning, Executing and Monitoring & Controlling categories of the PMP questions.

Project quality has a very different definition under instructional design than it has in a traditional manufacturing setting. Nevertheless, no aspect of the final deliverable is more important than the actual quality and effectiveness of the educational materials.

Managing project quality within instructional design takes some ingenuity, since any assessment of a project's "quality" can differ depending on an individual's subjective criteria. The most important judges of the project's quality are your client and the people who will be using your training.

Designers Share Their Experiences

Dr. Andy Gibbons - Instructional Psychology and Technology - BYU



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Well the first thing that you do, is that you hire really capable people. You hire people who are really good at what they do. And you wait until you find the really good person that you want. We looked really hard for a cartoonist on this project. We were training submarine finding helicopter pilots, and sensor operators, military people, and we're going to have some cartooning in our art, we decided. We looked and we looked, and we waited and we waited until we found a really good cartoonist. Sometimes when you get the quality worker, you get all the quality workers quirks with him, and so, we had to manage this cartoonist. That was quite a revealing experience. So number one, you get the best people you can, people who are competent, people who are good because those people are also usually fast. The second thing you do is, you're innovative in your designs. You design your materials, how do you describe it? You design your materials so they can be created by, according to some kind of a pattern that people can get used to. You use those patterns as efficiency tools. You control costs by not having, in the early days of computer based instruction, people were so inventive, every piece of computer based instruction was different in some way. Uniquely, sometimes gothically so. Well, students had to learn a whole new system of navigating a lesson. Because in one lesson the controls would be up here, and in one lesson the controls would be down here. And so it became confusing. Designers eventually learned how to use screen designs that were consistent in the placement of controls. The worldwide web works that way today. The controls all work the same regardless of what web page you go to, more or less. One of the things you can do for designers is to find these patterns that designers use, I don't want to use the word templates, but templates is kind of what it is. Lesson patterns that they use, so that the lessons have the same internal structure. And so you've got one class of lessons, maybe you've got fifteen lessons of this type, that have this kind of a strategy that require this much writing, this much art. And so you know how much that packet costs. And then there is this kind over here. It's going to require this kind of graphics, this kind of writing and this

amount. And so you use that as a projection tool. You have to know what the characteristics are of the thing that you're creating. The advent types become very important to you.

Heather Bryce - Independent Studies - BYU



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How I balance quality and time and cost is really a factor of my boss. They make the decision on whether to do a course. Now if we know a course is going to be a high enroller, you have more money to play with on a course. If a course is a low enroller there might be different reasons for doing that. We have to be stricter about our budget. So when we meet at the very beginning with the designer, we talk about it and say, okay basically this is the budget that you've been given. And we've gotten more strict with budget, so then you can fudge with time or quality. Every project is different. Some projects, you have an absolute deadline that you have to have a course available. So then, at that point you say, okay, then do we fudge on the quality, or do we fudge on the cost? So it really depends on each project. For the project that I did, Art 45, we went with quality. That was the one that we weren't going to sacrifice, and so we sacrificed cost on that one. But there have been other projects that we've had, where time was a factor and we had to get it out. On those we said, okay, we'll have to not do those videos, because that's a cost. So we cut our cost and maybe possibly the quality. Every project is different.

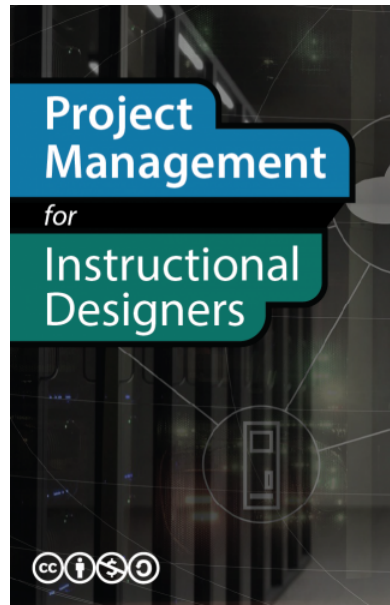
Dr. Larry Seawright - Center for Teaching and Learning - BYU



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So that's always a project manager's trade-off. How do you balance quality with time and money? If you had as much money, regardless of what the project is. Whether it's an instructional design project or building a bridge. If you have a lot of money and a lot of time you could make a great bridge. If you don't have as much money and you don't have as much time then your beautiful four lane bridge becomes a two lane bridge and hopefully it's still earthquake proof and all those kinds of things. So you manage those quality things, but you have to shrink things down. In our project, the BYU Learning Suite, we have a kind of, pretty fixed quality target, in that there is an existing learning management system. And so let's say the satisfaction level is here with the existing management system. So we have to at least hit that target. Now what we've had to do is define what that target is. Basically that means no outages, we can't look at the history of that learning management system and say, well when they first started there were lots of outages, and you know, things like that. We can't do that because when it first started they had one hundred faculty on it. We have eighty percent of the faculty now using the learning management system, and it affects virtually every student at Brigham Young University. We have to hit that level of reliability. What we could do is kind of take a look at the quality of the offering in terms of the number of features that are offered by the current learning management system and what we're going to initially offer in our new BYU Learning Suite learning management system. And what we did is we took a look at what are the features that are used by most of the faculty and students most of the time? And deliver those in a way that's easier to use than the existing system, just as reliable as the existing system. So those are kind of two quality elements that we looked at. It has to be just as reliable. And it has to be easier to use. And that's kind of difficult because we think, in our design, we think it's easier to use, but it's different, and so the users may not think it's easier to use initially. And so there's a training curve and a learning curve. After they use it a little bit they say, "Oh this is easier to use." But it's like going from one kind of

vehicle to another. They're both automatic transitions, but the shift mechanism is on the column in one and on the middle panel on the other one. And some people just never get used to that. Same thing with the learning management system. You click here in one, and you click here in another. And people, they'll just never get used to it and they'll think it's not as good. Quality is so subjective in applications like this. You just have to do what you can. And then you provide instructional help to help address some of those kinds of issues. And that's kind of one of the roles of the project manager is you go through and you start evaluating as it comes close to completion, and you start testing it within users. You find out what are the issues that they have? And you build just in time help so that they can click that little help icon or the help with this page and it brings up appropriate help that says, "Oh, this is what that is, now I know what to do." You can address some quality issues with help, but you don't want to rely on that. But the old saying of, "it should be so easy, no help is needed." You can almost never rely on that. As much as you'd like too.



Wiley, D. et al. (2018). Project Management for Instructional Designers. EdTech Books.
<https://edtechbooks.org/pm4id>



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