

Mini-Case Study: Closing Projects at Global Green Books Publishing

Global Green Books Publishing is continuing to grow. The customized eBooks line of work is continuing to grow, and they now have a lot of experience from the eBook projects that they have completed for their first eBook customer, a local college, and for their newer customers.

However, as new projects come in and start to run into problems, some of the project managers in the project management office and their manager, Samantha, were discussing how it seems like it is déjà vu all over again – some of the same problems that they thought they had solved in working with supervisors and their teams on past projects keep on occurring.

The eBook projects are functioning well, and customers are happy with the results. Repeat orders are coming in and new customers are turning to Global Green Books for their eBook production needs.

But, there are just some problems that seem to keep popping up. One of the project managers even described dealing with these problems as being like playing the popular arcade game of “Whack-a-Mole” - as soon as you deal with one to make it disappear, the same one or another one just pops up. It seems like a never-ending struggle to try and solve some of these problems, especially when some seem like they were already solved on another earlier project.

In the PM handbook that Samantha had implemented, when projects completed the supervisors finished tracking all of the actual effort and costs and turned that information over to cost accounting for billing purposes. As Samantha and colleagues implemented the project management office, they modified the PM manual to have a copy of this information also shared with the project management office. They have found this information to be sometimes useful as historical data to help develop estimates for new projects as requests for new eBooks come in from their customers.

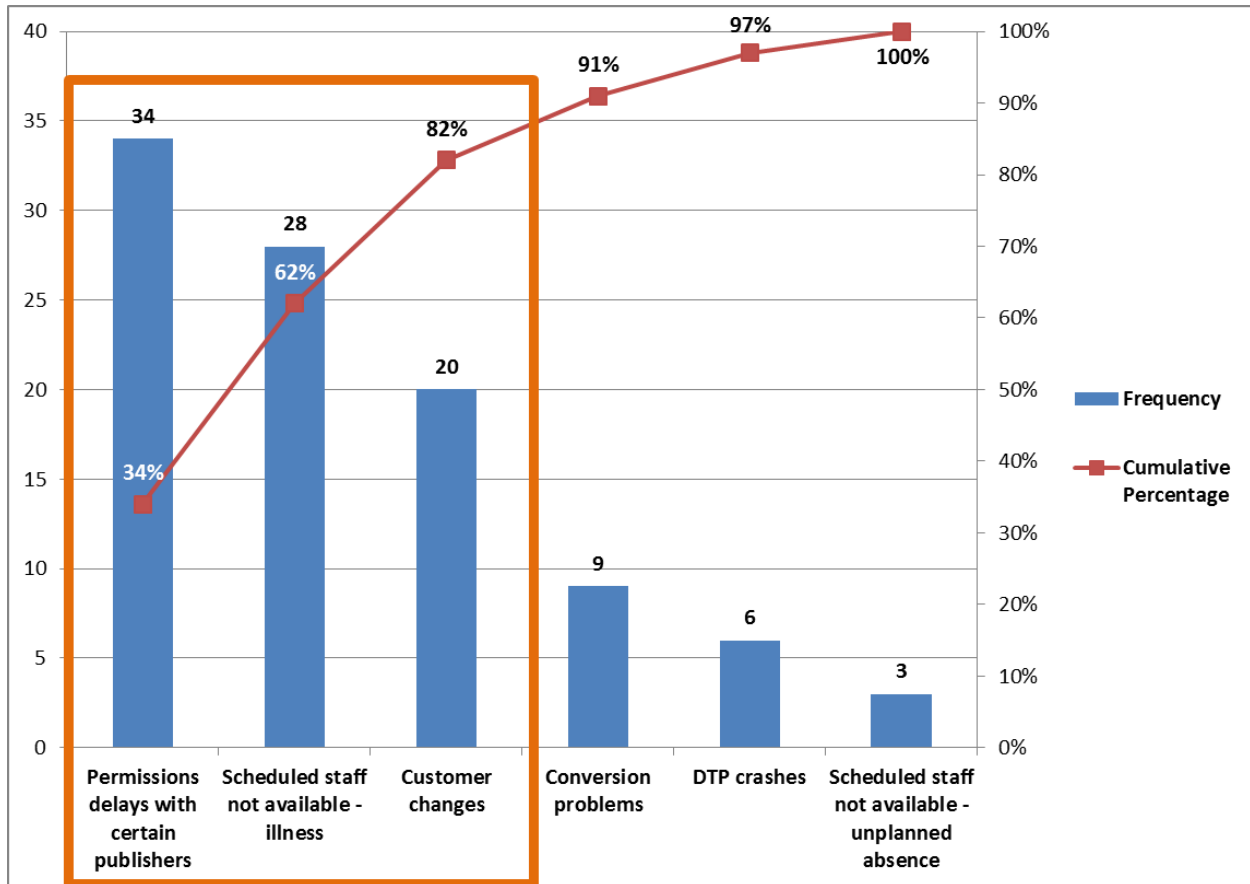
The PMO team was discussing making changes to the PM manual and holding a short training for supervisors to implement some improvements to their project completion processes. They wanted to change their standard job template to incorporate these additions:

- a planned task for supervisors to close out the project,
- a task to create a lessons learned report, and
- an optional task for a closing celebration for the team to mark the end of the project,

They felt that it was important that the PMO start capturing lessons learned. These could be collated by the supervisors at the end of the project, or they could encourage supervisors to plan, schedule and hold a project closing meeting with their team members to thank the team members and to collect lessons learned from all of the team. They could also invite feedback or participation from the relevant Customer Service Representatives and account managers.

The PMO received management approval for these changes, updated the PM manual, and held a brief training for supervisors. Supervisors liked the ideas, especially because the close-out meeting or team celebration would give them a chance to recognize and reward team members and would serve to motivate the teams for future projects. As time went on, the PMO started collecting these lessons learned from many projects.

As they collected these lessons learned from these projects, the PMO staff started to look at the data from the lessons learned across the projects. They examined frequency of the six kinds of issues that were being encountered on the projects. The histogram below shows their results.



Based on feedback from the leadership training that they had done with the supervisors, they had thought that the major cause of delays and extra costs on projects were part-time student employees calling off from work at the last minute, leaving planned work not performed until another resource could be assigned to it, which was often difficult as there were few slack resources. This made tasks late and sometimes delayed projects from completing on time.

Their analysis showed that that wasn't the case at all. In fact only three of the problems on projects were caused by unplanned absences. In their Pareto analysis, the PMO staff identified three key problems, which they highlighted in red. Delays in obtaining necessary reprint permissions from certain publishers were the largest cause of problems, accounting for 34% of the problems encountered by eBook projects. Production staff calling in sick was the next most frequent problem, accounting for 28% of the problems. Customer changes, which often caused rework and delays, were the root cause of another 20% of the problems.

The PMO now knew what the most important issues were that were causing eBook projects to be delayed, and could make recommendations to mitigate each of these problems.

Comment on the following aspects of the case study:

- a) What are some of the reasons why it is important to close out a project? What can project managers accomplish in closing out a project?
- b) Why should projects capture lessons learned? What are some ways that the project team members, project managers and the organization can use lessons learned?
- c) What benefits come from celebrating project accomplishments? Do you believe that rewards and recognition can serve as motivators for staff?
- d) Explain what a Pareto chart is. Why would you use this technique to identify and prioritize problem areas? Are there some limitations on interpreting the results of a Pareto analysis?
- e) If you were the PMO looking at this Pareto analysis, what recommendations might you make to address the three key problem areas in eBook projects that this analysis identified?