LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #11 *Hot Button Issues In Training Project Management*

[music]

Announcer: SyberWorks podcast. Learn any time, any place.

Mary Kay Lofurno: Welcome to the next edition of the SyberWorks e-Learning podcast series. I am Mary Kay Lofurno, Marketing Director for SyberWorks, and I'm your host. In today's segment, we will discuss hot-button issues in training project management and provide an answer to the question: How do you turn down a project and not lose your job?

[music]

Mary Kay: And now we will begin our interview with Mark Bower, President of Bower & Co, Inc- a learning and performance management consulting firm.

Good afternoon, Mark. How are you today?

Mark Bower: I'm great, Mary Kay. It's really nice to get together with you on the phone.

Mary Kay: Well, thanks. Well, I'm glad to have you here with us. So let's get started.

Mark: Sounds great.

Mary Kay: So, Mark, how do you turn down a project and not lose your job?

Mark: Well, that's one of the great mysteries of our time, but I think I've got some ideas on how we might be able to do that.

Mary Kay: OK, go ahead.

Mark: I think the critical issue with managing the training project portfolio and a client project is to have a comprehensive resource plan in place. This resource plan ensures you are producing training projects efficiently and cost-effectively. It's really the foundation of an informed decision to decline a project where you do not have the resources to complete it. Your organization will gain respect from these informed business decisions.

So that's kind of what I'm thinking on that. What do you think, Mary Kay?

Mary Kay: I think you're right about that. So it would seem to me that the biggest problem any training manager would have is how to complete projects on-time and in-budget. Can you give us some "rules of thumb" and practical suggestions on how to accomplish the task at hand?

Mark: I really can do that, and I'd be glad to do that. Well, basically, when developing a project plan for your training courses, it's really important to look at both the quantitative factors as well as the people factors. When beginning a training project, the delivery medium is the first thing we need to look at.

Mary Kay: OK.

Mark: There was a time when this was simpler, but the wider variety of training mediums today makes our choice a little more complex. For purposes here, let's look at four basic delivery mediums. These are traditional instructor-led training, webcasting or virtual classrooms, basic e-learning, and advanced e-learning.

Mary Kay: OK.

SYBERWORKS
Learn Anytime, Any Place

411 Waverley Oaks Road
Building 3, Suite 319
Waltham, MA 02452
www.syberworks.com
1-888-642-7078

Mark: Now, this is important, because each delivery medium has different resource requirements for development. For example, we have found that traditional instructor-led training requires approximately 40 hours of development for one hour of training.

Mary Kay: I've heard that, yep.

Mark: This means a 4-hour instructor-led course will take approximately 160 hours of development. We have also found that virtual instructor-led training requires approximately 50 hours of development for one hour of training, basic e-learning; 80 hours, and advanced e-learning; 160 hours.

Mary Kay: OK. And those sound like really good benchmarks. Can you tell me some more?

Mark: Once we've determined our delivery medium, we need to estimate our aggregate course development hours. That gives us an idea of the size of our project. For purposes here, let's look at two delivery mediums. The first would be traditional instructor-led training. If we are developing a 4-hour course in the instructor-led format, our total resource requirements will be 160 development hours, using our development ratio of 40 to 1.

Mary Kay: Well, that makes sense. OK.

Mark: All right, I'll keep going. If we are developing a course in basic e-learning format, the totally required development hours would be 320, using our development ratio of 80 to 1. Granted, these ratios vary from project to project, but they are a good starting point, based on our experience providing over 325, 000 course development hours to our clients.

To get these two projects a little more perspective, there are approximately 160 development hours for an individual in a given month. So in general terms, we're looking at approximately one-month duration to develop the instructor-led course, and approximately two months for the basic e-learning.

Mary Kay: That's a good rule of thumb. What else can you tell us?

Mark: After developing the overall project plan, we need to assign specific development tasks and resources to the project. So basically, you know how many hours the project will take, based on the metrics, but you need to add the skills and talent that will really make that project happen.

For instructor-led training, we utilize two resources. These are an instructional designer and a graphic artist. We have found that the instructional designer will use 90 percent of the development hours and the graphic designer 10 percent of the available development hours.

Mary Kay: Mm-hmm.

Mark: The graphic design hours are used for illustrations, diagrams, and graphics, to reinforce course objectives and content. This means our instructor-led course will utilize 144 instructional design hours and 14 graphic design hours, or approximately one month of instructional designer time and two days of graphic design.

Based on this information, we can develop a very specific resource plan timeline and estimate a completion date, based on the resources we have available.

Mary Kay: Sounds good.

Mark: So next, how about if we look at our basic e-learning course?

Mary Kay: OK.

GSA

SYBERWORKS
Learn Anytime, Any Place

411 Waverley Oaks Road
Building 3, Suite 319
Waltham, MA 02452
www.syberworks.com
1-888-642-7078

Mark: We have already determined that this is a 4-hour course requiring 320 total development hours. Resource assignments for an e-learning course are a bit more complex than traditional instructor-led training. This is because e-learning needs additional technical resources for development and deployment. The projects are also longer and more complex, requiring project management.

We assigned five functional skills to our e-learning development teams. These are instructional design, programming, graphic design, project management, and quality control. We have found that these function groups require the following percentages of the total project time. Now, these numbers are based on the overall project scope of 320 hours...

Mary Kay: OK.

Mark: Now, when we assign the tasks, when we look at the instructional designer, instructional designers, historically, with basic e-learning, take about 37 percent of the available hours, or in this case 118 hours. Programming, historically, takes about 33 percent, or 106 hours. Graphic design, about 10 percent, or 32 hours. Project management, 10 percent, or 32 hours. And quality control, 10 percent, or 32 hours.

So that gives us the resources we need to complete the project, as well as the time they're going to need, based on our metrics to complete it.

Mary Kay: Mm-hmm.

Mark: Once we're done with that, we need a sequence of functional skills and resource requirements on a timeline. This establishes our project duration and completion dates. We do this by determining which tasks can occur concurrently and which tasks are prerequisites for other tasks to occur.

Mary Kay: Mm-hmm. That's right.

Mark: Now, project management occurs concurrently with all tasks, but quality control can only begin when programming is completed. So when we put this all together, in summary, this project will take about one and a half months to complete and require two person-months of resource time.

Mark Kay: Well, that sounds about right.

Mark: So that gives you a ballpark to see what your project portfolio looks like, and what projects you can complete and which you can't. So this is the quantitative side of project development. There's also a people side as well.

We have found that development teams are usually not comfortable with standard development metrics. This translates into a lack of confidence that the work can be done in the time allocated.

There is always a trade-off between the perfect project and the time and budget constraints that we all work with. In our development environment it is the job of the project manager to make any resource refinements least required by a project, get the team comfortable with the resource requirements, and move forward.

It is also important to look at risk factors when setting up and committing to a project schedule. Some of these factors are:

1. Experience with content; It is always safer to work with training content that we are familiar with.

2. New technology; As with content, utilizing technologies that we are familiar with will always reduce project risk.

![SYBERWORKS Learn Anytime, Any Place]

411 Waverley Oaks Road
Building 3, Suite 319
Waltham, MA 02452
www.syberworks.com
1-888-642-7078

3. There's audience commitment; Ensure that the audience is committed to the training and supports that it is a good business decision.

4. Available resources; In today's fast paced business world we are constantly resource-constrained in performing more with less.

5. Readiness and availability of required content; Is the required training content finaized and available? That is, is the product ready for introduction?

6. Finally, a realistic deadline; Do you have a reasonable amount of time to complete the project based on both quantitative and qualitative factors?

7. Content or review delays; Does your project schedule incorporate possible delays in receiving content or having content reviewed?

All these factors can take a well-planned project off course. Once the project is underway, it is often a challenge to keep the project on schedule and within projected resource requirements. We have found that the following often jeopardize project schedules once a project has begun. First one is Discovery. These are requirements that surface after a project has started and could not have been foreseen. Next one is review delays. These are project delays caused by time-constrained subject matter experts and reviewers. Next is Product and Process changes. These happen quite often. Changes in products and processes after training development has begun.

Project team perfectionism. Generally budget and schedule requirements dictate the duration, objectives and coverage of a course.

Project teams must expect that they will not be able to develop the perfect course and must develop to business constraints. Often content is over-developed when we try for the perfect course. This is especially troublesome in e-learning courses because of the dependencies of other project members and the ripple effect of additional content for programming and graphics. A project can quadruple in size and scope very easily.

Mary Kay: That's true.

Mark: So in summary, if we follow these simple guidelines, we will ensure that training development is efficient and effective. This provides the foundation for accepting and declining training projects. It also ensures your staff doesn't have to work 60 hours a week and will gain the respect of company management.

Mary Kay: Well, that's true. Nobody likes working 60 hours a week, do they?

Mark: No, they certainly don't, and you certainly don't have to.

Mary Kay: That's true. Well, Mark, thanks. You've given us a lot of great information today. It's really been great. Thanks so much.

Mark: Well, thanks very much for the time, Mary Kay. So we'll talk to you soon.

Mary Kay: This is Mark Kay Lofurno, marketing director at SyberWorks. I wish also to thank you for listening to our interview with Mark Bower, president of Bower & Co, a learning and performance consultant firm. In our next instalment of the SyberWorks e-learning podcast series, we will talk with Mark about picking the right solution, depending upon your business goal. Or to put it in another way, when to use the dessert fork and not the spoon. See you next month.

GSA

Announcer: SyberWorks Podcast. Learn any time, any place.

[music]