

Communicating Intent involves two principles:

- Communication
- Intent

While attention is always paid to effective communication in project management, our focus here is on the principle and importance of intent to agility.

Brian J. Reed [1] describes how the military deals with the complexity of operational environments involving a combination of conditions, circumstances and influences. One of the doctrines the armed forces uses to deal with such environments is **intent-based** orders.

When people know the desired destination, they're free to improvise as needed in arriving there.

While project environments are not as complex as military operating environments, we face a combination of conditions including changing requirements, customer demands, evolving market conditions and changing technologies.

Project management invests a significant amount of time planning for its projects. This is done using detailed planning at the start of the project, the start of each phase or iterative planning as espoused by agile development methods.

All this is required for the team and the stakeholders to understand what, how, and when the project pieces are delivered.

There is one significant drawback.

With **intent-based** initiatives, the focus is on **purpose** rather than details or methods of performing a task.

Likewise, no project plan survives intact when there are changing circumstances and external influences.

Current project environments would require changes to be handled via a process that

involves boards and committees. Yet, to be agile,

In the 1980s, The U.S. Army created commander's intent (CI), which is a simple statement that appears at the top of every order specifying:

1. The plan's goal
2. The desired end-state of an operation

The commander's intent concept has long been proven successful in practice. It is simply how a commander conveys his or her desired end-state, so subordinates can operate in the absence of specific orders.



“Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.”

General George S. Patton

“No plan survives contact with the enemy.

Col. Tom Kolditz - head of the behavioral sciences at US Military Academy.

COMMUNICATING INTENT

THE PRIMARY KEY TO AGILITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The answer is not to diminish planning, but to make sure that the project can adapt to these influences.

there must be avoidance, where possible, of bureaucratic elements with the potential to slow down the project.

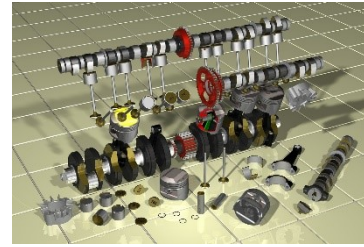
To be agile, the focus of the project manager should be in establishing intent.

The process of establishing the end goal and effectively communicating the same to the team allows the team to make agile decisions based on the project intent.

Intent-driven projects allow the project team to adapt and adjust to challenges without the need for administrative approval, as long as the intent is not compromised. Decisions are increasingly weighed against whether the change is needed/not needed based on how it impacts the end goal of the project.

In his article, "Communicating Intent: The New Frontier in Engineering", Chad Jackson points out, "Engineers must now work with those on their engineering teams as well as stakeholders from far and wide in the enterprise. They must now take enterprise considerations into account alongside form, fit and function requirements when making design decisions. As a result, they must be able to clearly and concisely communicate their engineering intent."

Jackson heralds a new application that addresses technical product communication needs by embedding the engineers' intent in lightweight, sharable 2D and 3D forms of their 3D CAD models. So now, engineers can more efficiently create, update and deliver information in the form of technical product communications, and stakeholders can work independently with these deliverables to clearly understand the engineers' intent.



Thus, engineers have more time to do what they do best: design great products.

The advantages of intent-based planning are:

- Achieving more time for each team member to do what they do best
- Flexibility to make changes within the parameters of the intent without bureaucratic involvement
- Efficiency

Unlike the engineer whose primary purpose is to design, the project manager is the commander that must effectively communicate intent to the team and the stakeholders. If he does, he should spend less time micromanaging all the details of the project, since his team will develop more confidence in their freedom to achieve the understood results.

Authors:
Satinder Baweja
Lori Vidak

References

[1] Brian J Reed, "Leadership development, learning Agility and the Army profession, The Institute of land warfare"

[2] Chad Jackson, "Communicating Intent: The New Frontier in Engineering", Lifecycle Insights, © 2012 LC-Insights LLC, <http://www.edstechnologies.com/Mailer/may13>

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