In the dramatic television series "Mad Men," a fictional Madison Avenue advertising agency continually creates new campaigns and pitches them to clients.

Why Every Project Needs a Brand (and How to Create One)

Project leaders who embrace a brand mindset will be in a stronger position to achieve their goals and deliver on the organization's business strategy.

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THE LEADING QUESTION

How can leaders get the right level of attention, resources and support for their projects?

FINDINGS

- Project leaders must sequence, time and articulate core messages about their projects to the right audiences.
- Branding the project will make it easier to succeed (at least internally).
- The key is to adapt the principles of traditional brand management to the planning, development, launch and delivery of project initiatives.

BRANDS. PRODUCTS HAVE THEM. Services have them. Organizations have them. Even people have them (think Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey or Frank Gehry). And, we argue, the internal face of every company project needs one as well.

Broadly speaking, a brand can be defined as a unique value proposition expressed in a relevant and differentiated way such that it creates preference and loyalty among key audiences.

So why is *project* branding important? Because your project can suffer in the absence of a compelling brand.

Consider the project environment at innovation heavyweight 3M. CEO George Buckley recently described the uphill struggle he faces to rally teams and support for seemingly mundane projects not perceived to offer breakthrough potential. For example, there was the recent decision by the 108-year-old company to seek improvements in one of its oldest product lines — industrial-grade sandpaper. The project was strategically important to 3M's organic growth goals, but employees shied away from it, preferring to put their efforts into more high-profile initiatives. Buckley lamented that projects that R&D teams do not find "sexy" often acquire second-tier status.

He found himself propelling such projects forward by brute force, observing that his relentless emphasis on lower-profile projects in 3M labs "basically drove them crazy."[1]

The situation at 3M is not unique. And although Buckley as CEO could commandeer project resources, most project managers do not wield that kind of clout. Many operate in authority vacuums where they have little or no formal control over the people on whom they must rely to achieve project goals. What's more, project leaders, when they are able to rally teams, often focus too narrowly on the work to be done. In their preoccupation with task accomplishment, project leaders frequently overlook the importance of establishing, maintaining and communicating to key stakeholders a clear, consistent and compelling vision of project purpose, goals and benefits. Consequently, they miss important opportunities for gaining support and, in the worst cases, contribute to the untimely deaths of ill-branded projects.

Project managers and project sponsors will gain distinct advantage and be in stronger positions to achieve their goals, advance their careers and deliver on the company's business objectives if they adapt the principles of traditional brand management to the planning, development, launch and delivery of project initiatives.

The Complex World of the Project Leader

As local and global competition intensifies and organizations seek ways to reinvent themselves, the number of project initiatives expands rapidly. For example, initiatives near the bottom of 3M's innovation pyramid have not replaced more high-profile breakthrough projects but have been added to the activities of the company's R&D teams.

At the same time, budgets are shrinking and, despite the obvious need to do so, organizations do not always rationally allocate resources across projects according to their strategic value. The result is a dog-eat-dog world where project leaders battle daily to acquire and sustain control over resources. Team members in matrix organizations often juggle multiple projects and responsibilities. While being pulled in several directions, they tend to focus on the projects most interesting to them or most important to their careers (see "Project Image Does Matter"), making gut-level decisions about how and where to allocate their efforts. Moving beyond the traditional matrix structure, emerging organizational forms involving multiple external partnerships and dotted-line internal links require projects to draw on resources through formal and informal channels inside and outside the home enterprise. These configurations require leaders to attend to more complex and geographically far-flung constellations of stakeholders in building and sustaining support for, and engagement in, their projects.

In these demanding environments, project leaders must sequence, time and articulate core messaging about their projects in much the same way a marketing manager would organize an external-customer-facing branding effort to promote a company's products and services. Just as product branding creates awareness and sustains value in the minds of an organization's external customers, shareholders and constituents, a brand mindset can empower a project leader to develop strategically timed messages to create visibility and engagement among key targets. Depending on the stage of the project, different project brand audiences may include

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Ideas for this article grew out of over a decade working with executives and companies in our various roles as participant observers, executive seminar leaders, consultants and curious academics. When asked to name their biggest challenges in delivering project results, managers and executives consistently highlight insufficient stakeholder support or, worse, stakeholder sabotage. Common responses range from "No one appreciated the importance of the project" to "We couldn't gain access to critical resources" to "There were people undermining the project at every step." As we considered how project leaders might overcome these challenges, the ways in which a project is represented to internal company audiences seemed pivotal. We came to believe that for both successful and unsuccessful projects, the project manager's role in representing the project to the internal company environment can be defined by a series of distinct but related stages; across these stages, the more successful projects share some elements and strategies consistent with best practices of successful brand management in marketing.

Building on these ideas, we developed the 5Ps (pitch, plan, platform, performance and payoff) framework of project branding and began a more structured investigation involving dozens of in-depth interviews with project leaders and project sponsors across a range of industries, including aerospace, electronics, higher education, nonprofit and public sector services, health care, hospitality, defense contracting, telecommunications, electrical power, Internet and medical devices. Although each project we assessed was unique and unfolded differently, the 5Ps framework was robust and applicable in each instance. More importantly, our disciplined approach to project branding resonated strongly with our interviewees; nearly all our field contacts stated something akin to the following: "I never thought of my project environment that way, but, yes, it is all about managing my project brand internally." We have introduced the 5Ps framework in our executive seminars, and here, too, we have received affirmation of its value. And, with each conversation, we add to our arsenal of company cases where projects failed or succeeded as a result of attention to project branding.

PROJECT IMAGE DOES MATTER

Why do some projects attract support and energy inside an organization while others flounder? Our research into dozens of companies has reinforced our appreciation for the natural appeal some projects have over others. Four factors appear to contribute to a project's inherent brand: strategic importance, reputation of the project leader, project viability and client status. Although project leaders do not fully control all of these, project sponsors should bear them in mind when initiating new projects. Let's take the factors one at a time.

Strategic Importance. Projects closely linked to high-level strategic goals generally attract more energy than those whose strategic links are less clear. The fact that people shun projects with apparent low priority actually offers an indirect advantage from the standpoint of natural selection — if something is not worthwhile, it's probably a good thing people direct their attention toward more important issues. On the other hand, perception may not reflect a project's true value within the organization. That is where project branding comes in.

The Project Leader. Leader choice sends a signal about the project's significance to the organization and also provides inferences about the way the project will be run. The individual with a reputation as an effective leader who sets a vision, establishes clear goals, energizes the team and removes obstacles to project completion has a natural brand that draws participation and support. In our research, a frequent observation among senior business leaders was that the individual assigned to lead a project creates a halo that marches ahead of information about the project's purpose or direction. Not surprisingly, people clamor to be associated with the most respected project leaders.

Perceived Project Viability. A feasible idea is just easier to sell than one that sounds futile. The director of operations in the Beijing unit of a global software company observed that programmers and developers sniff out informal vibes about a project's viability before volunteering to contribute. As he commented, " If a project that comes from the corporate office looks like an experimental idea with low probability for success or mainstream sustainability, they politely avoid it. Sometimes I have to tactfully send project assignments back to corporate headquarters for reassignment rather than allow them to fail or flounder under my watch."

Client Status. Every project has a client, whether internal or external to the organization. Potential team members and supporters are likely to clamor for assignments that involve clients with high profiles, positive reputations and a history of cooperative partnering. Here is another case where natural selection might argue for not accepting all projects: Some clients aren't worth it. On the other hand, if a difficult client does bring substantial business into the organization, the project sponsor and leader will have to generate more internal interest, not only through branding but also through efforts aimed at improving the working relationship.

Given the four factors that create natural brands for projects, are projects with weak or negative brands doomed? Not necessarily. The project leader, equipped with a branding mindset and the right tools, can strongly influence the perceived importance of the project with key stakeholders and, consequently, the project's potential for success.

senior business leaders, project sponsors and team members with primary allegiances to vertical functions, as well as network partners external to the home organization. The savvy project leader will ensure that all parties up, down, across and outside the organization understand, internalize and embrace the promise of the project brand, agree on goals and employ steadfast support for the initiative through its completion. (See "The Project Leader's Branding Tool Kit," p. 67.)

The 5Ps of Project Branding

Based on more than a decade of research and observation in a wide range of organizations, we have identified five key stages in the project branding life cycle: pitch, plan, platform, performance and payoff. (See "About the Research.") We depict these sequentially, but the flow is not strictly linear. Moreover, some projects may unfold in ways that involve cycling through one or more of the stages in an iterative way. (See "A Sequential View of the 5Ps of Project Branding," p. 65.)

The idea behind the 5Ps framework is similar to, and offers many of the same advantages as, a well-organized, external-customer-focused brand campaign. With an understanding of the five branding phases, the project leader will be in a strong position to assess the roles and motivations of specific target audiences and offer a compelling set of relevant benefits to each. Project-specific benefits will include *functional* elements (an improved process that better serves customers) as well as *emotional* elements (personal satisfaction derived from working as part of a cohesive and energetic project team) that stakeholders can expect to receive if they support a project or participate in its delivery. (See "Making Project Branding Work, From Pitch to Payoff," p. 64.)

Use of the 5Ps framework is not a one-time planning exercise but a focused and sustained effort whose aim is to keep the brand alive and relevant from pitch to payoff.

Pitch The pitch represents the project champion's initial effort to position and sell an idea by persuading key decision makers of the importance of the underlying problem or strategic opportunity the project will address. Without answers to the question "why?" those with approval power will have little interest in the

MAKING PROJECT BRANDING WORK, FROM PITCH TO PAYOFF

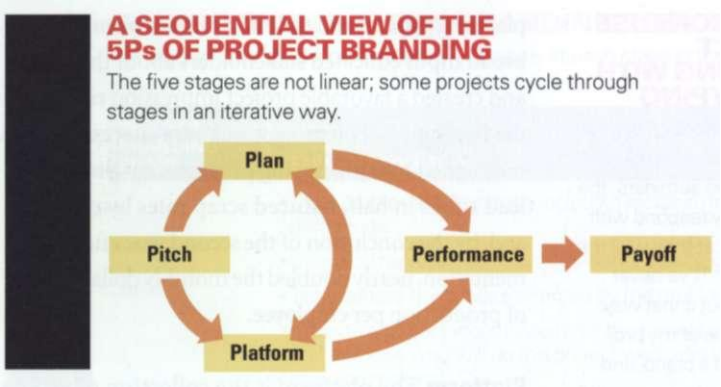
We provide project leaders with a set of dimensions and questions to understand and navigate at each stage of the project branding process. Starting with the imperative at each stage, a project leader must consider how best effectively to (a) manage branding messages and (b) avoid the pitfalls (red flags) of debilitating project breakers.

KEY PROJECT BRAND DIMENSIONS	PITCH Initial effort to sell the need for the project	PLAN Project goals and activities	PLATFORM Official project launch	PERFORMANCE Delivery of project promise	PAYOFF Proof of project promise
The Imperative	•Explain why the organization should care about and support the project •Persuade key decision makers of the need for change in terms of a tangible gap •For a bottom-up pitch, make the work itself seem compelling and attractive	•Identify goals, personnel, responsibilities, risks and project promise •Involve key stakeholders to ensure feasibility and credibility	•Formally launch the project to legitimize and socialize it within the organization	•Competently deliver on the project's promise •Make results transparent to stakeholders •Demonstrate resilience in responding to unexpected events	•Definitively close the project; disseminate proof of promise delivery and lessons learned •Regardless of outcome, state why effort was worthwhile •Acknowledge supporters
Managing the Message	•Focus on the challenge and opportunity, not the project •Link to business strategy and long-term viability •Articulate project promise •Align the right message source to the audience	•Link planned project actions to project promise •Encourage honest and open communication about risks and seek input for mitigation •Build or maintain confidence and trust in project viability •Articulate each audience's link/claim to project payoff and tap into participants' motivations	•Make an emotional as well as an intellectual connection — get into the audience's hearts and heads by describing what it is and why it matters to them •Message must demonstrate that the right people are on board •Express the message in ways that resonate with each target audience, but assure message consistency across audiences	•Execute previously developed project branding and communication plan •Follow through on how often, how much and with whom to communicate •Affirm (or revise) the medium for communication and who will send the message •Timing and vehicle are key: Choose right moments and touch points •Honestly acknowledge setbacks •Demonstrate resiliency in the face of challenges •Emphasize interim performance that ties to end goals	•Articulate achievement of project goals (and goals not met) •Celebrate project process — especially in scientific and technical settings where risks are significant. Efficient and thorough project work deserves applause, even if business results are not as envisioned •Link achievement of project objectives to business strategy
Brand Breakers and Red Flags	•Jumping too quickly to the work to be carried out without selling the problem driving the need for change •"Sky is falling" syndrome: Champion attempts to make a problem sound bigger than it really is •Failure to make an emotional connection with the audience •Using confusing language or engaging in data overload, both of which limit audience's ability to understand the problem •Promoting a "pet" project linked to career advancement or personal agenda and not business objectives	•Failure to involve immediate team members and other key stakeholders in developing the plan •Inability to get the right people on the project team •Omitting communication and branding activities from the plan •Failure to examine project uncertainties as part of planning — overlooking risks that expose the project to potential land mines or positive uncertainties that might cause the project to miss opportunities •Failure to define roles and responsibilities clearly	•Failure to invite and showcase key stakeholders at kickoff event •Failure to articulate the underlying rationale for the project •Launching the project with an inappropriate amount of fanfare — activities that are too grand or too limited to fit the scope and importance of the project •Failure to gain emotional tie-in and intellectual buy-in •Overpromising outcomes •Surprising important stakeholders — not informing them ahead of time about launch messages	•Undercommunicating good or bad news •Failure to demonstrate resiliency •Failure to follow through on commitments made to stakeholders •Failure to "test for understanding" — not confirming that messages sent have been received and processed •Focusing performance measurement on cost and schedule alone, with no attention to other important metrics associated with the project promise •Surprising customers and key stakeholders with information that should have been conveyed in preliminary communications	•Not formally closing out the project •Absence of any end-of-project celebration that honors contributions of participants •Failure to link outcomes to project promise •Failure to reward and broadly recognize (to the participants, their managers and the organization) the contributions of project team members and other stakeholders •Unavailability of project metrics by which the success in meeting stated goals may be assessed •No effort to capture lessons learned

"what." The success of the pitch determines whether or not the project is sanctioned to move forward and also creates an enduring first impression from which subsequent perceptions about its relevance and value will be judged. It is a critical moment that, if handled without attention to establishing a strong and compelling brand, can dilute a project's potential to attract enough resources and support or, worse, kill the idea before it has a chance to germinate.

The pitch can occur as a high-level event in a single shot, or it may occur in escalating stages when building momentum and support is necessary. A single-shot pitch typically involves senior-level decision makers as the target audience and is appropriate for projects of major organizational consequence such as facility closures, new product launches or corporate restructuring initiatives. However, in many environments it is more appropriate to start with a softer or slower pitch at a lower level to gain input and garner support from those whose hands-on participation will ultimately determine the project's success. Such would be the case for ideas that need more germination time or those that involve grassroots-level process improvements. A slow-pitch strategy was the approach of choice for a product manager at a global Internet company. He learned that he had the best chance of selling a project idea to C-suite executives if he first persuaded programmers to use some of their discretionary time (at this company, 15%) to test an idea. His pitch had to be compelling enough to offer intrinsic motivation for the programmers, so he had to make the work itself, as well as the outcome, seem appealing. If the initial work proved promising, senior-level decision makers would be the next stop for a more strategic pitch. (See "A Pitch Gone Awry," p. 66, for a glimpse of what can go wrong when a project is presented.)

Plan The plan represents the process of clarifying goals, determining what needs to be done and when, anticipating possible risks, assigning responsibilities and developing a communication strategy for delivering the right messages at the right times to the right audiences. The project plan must be developed in an honest and open manner: Authenticity plays a vital role in generating positive visibility and building and maintaining broader stakeholder confidence in the project's viability. If the planning process is thorough and incorporates careful analysis of risks, involves input from representative individuals and groups and produces a clear, accessible road map, stakeholders will feel a sense of confidence in its feasibility. If the plan is created behind closed doors with little or no input, the project is likely to come out of the gates with a less than attractive brand. Even worse, the brand will quickly erode as naysayers and those who feel slighted fill the information void with damaging rumors.



A quick case study makes the point. At a global engineering company, corporate executives decided to merge two work units that had operated separately since a corporate acquisition 10 years previously. The consulting company hired to develop the project plan held meetings with key stakeholders and requested their input. These individuals appreciated being involved and offered numerous ideas for smoothing the transition. The consultants thanked the participants but then immediately told them how the plan would unfold, signaling that the input process had been merely window dressing. They clearly had no intention of using stakeholder ideas. As of this writing, the merger of the two units has fared poorly, garnering weak support and actually generating some sabotage.

In contrast, consider a project to redesign manufacturing activities at a facility making precision electronics for the defense communications sector. The project leader and his highly representative core design team crafted a project plan that was then shared with a broader set of stakeholder groups, including the plant leadership and support areas (materials, human resources, information technology). Input from these groups helped the project leader and team to improve the plan and avoid several potential land mines they had not anticipated (the need to change formal job descriptions). The transparency of the

DON'T CONFUSE PROJECT BRANDING WITH OVERHYPING

When we introduce project branding to audiences in our executive seminars, the vast majority respond with amazement at how well the concept fits: "I've never thought about it that way, but every one of my projects has had a brand, and not all of them were good!"

However, a small subset respond with initial skepticism, equating branding with overhyping, a practice likely to generate distrust among those whose support is essential. But branding efforts must be tailored to fit the project and the culture (national and organizational). For nuts-and-bolts projects at the operating level, a softer approach is likely to be the best fit. That could involve a brief e-mail from the project sponsor or an announcement within a meeting that covers several other topics. For strategic-level projects, a more overt and formal branding effort such as an all-company webcast might be appropriate.

planning process and the efforts undertaken to solicit broad input educated stakeholders about the project and created a favorable project impression right from the beginning. The project was very successful: The redesigned manufacturing processes cut production lead times in half, reduced scrap rates by over 80% and, by the conclusion of the second year after implementation, nearly doubled the monthly dollar volume of production per employee.

Platform The platform is the collection of visible activities that comprise the official project launch. It may take place after only a limited amount of high-level planning, or it may be the culmination of an intensive planning effort. Branding success at the platform stage depends on the way the initiative is legitimized and socialized to the entire organization, not just to direct project participants and higher-level decision makers. It is imperative that key stakeholders view the project as relevant to their business units and functions yet also as contributing to the organization's business strategy.

Every project needs an official and visible starting point. And although not all project launches need to be extravagant, those that touch or are touched by the initiative must recognize that the project is a legitimate reality. The extent of fanfare must be tailored to the project's strategic significance and to the culture of the organization. (See "Don't Confuse Project Branding with Overhyping.") Clearly, a project of limited significance launched from an over-the-top platform will create expectations that cannot be met, no matter how well the project is executed. National culture significantly colors what is considered "overhyping." For example, Americans are more likely to accept a project launched with a bit of salesmanship, but in Asian cultures a toned-down project initiation event would be more appropriate.

The experience of a heavy-equipment manufacturer engaged in a major enterprisewide restructuring makes the point. The project was officially launched with a grand event broadcast from corporate headquarters to 10 sites in the United States and Canada. Key players were gathered for an elaborate luncheon at venues set up at each site. So far so good, but several things unfolded prior to and during the event that engendered distrust and eroded confidence. Attendees had been asked for input about logos for some of the new work units that would be created, and a request for shirt size suggested that new garments would brand the entities about to be formed. The organization frequendy used shirts, hats and other logo-marked clothing as a way of branding project teams, so the expectation that polo-style shirts would be distributed was certainly on the mark. But on the day of the grandly presented launch, there were no shirts, there were no logos and there was no explanation or apology as to why. Much more importantly, the project launch announcements offered vague descriptions about what people should expect to happen as the project unfolded, and there was considerable lack of clarity regarding who would be in charge. Not surprisingly, the senior managers tagged to carry out the reorganization were left with a post-platform cleanup, wondering if the initiative could possibly have gotten off to a worse start. As of this writing, the restructuring has been a sorry failure.

Performance In the context of branding, performance represents the way the leader and team communicate information about delivery of the project's promise following the official launch. A project brand can be bolstered or diminished during the performance phase, depending on the timing and transparency of progress reporting, interim

A PITCH GONE AWRY

At a West Coast-based organization that provides business management services to small enterprises, a company vice president pitched an idea to his executive-level peers for changing the incentive structure for the employee group responsible for telephone sales. The new system would incorporate clawbacks on commissions when customers experiencing buyers' remorse canceled service plans they had purchased. The other executives rejected his proposal, and the vice president recognized in retrospect that he had not presented a compelling problem statement that would convince company leaders of the need for change. All they could see was a major downside of the idea — pushback and ire from members of the sales team. The vice president ultimately rebranded the pitch and sold the idea to his colleagues by using facts, unhappy customer testimonials and graphically displayed data to illustrate the negative impact the customer chum rate was having on the company's long-term growth objectives. It is critical to cast the pitch right; in this case, there was an opportunity to rebrand it, but not all project leaders will get a second chance.

provision of promised benefits, honesty about setbacks and demonstrations of resiliency in the face of challenges. The project leader must realize the danger of undercommunicating during the performance phase: Any information vacuum will be filled by those with competing interests or doubts.

News stories surrounding the Boeing 787 Dreamliner offer lessons about what *not to do* during the performance phase of project branding. The airplane project is now years behind schedule and woefully over budget. Since its inception, Boeing public relations staff members have hyped the program in the media in efforts to sustain the project brand with employees, suppliers, customers and stakeholders such as regulatory bodies. But some analysts and business columnists have expressed doubts about the company's ability to deliver on its promises as dates for major milestones continue to be drawn out into the future.[2] When Boeing has come clean with the media, company officials have admitted technical problems were recognized long before they were made public. Recently, Boeing has launched a new corporate-level effort to encourage a more open communication environment where employees feel safe in bringing problems to the surface rather than hiding them.[3] However, organizational culture does not change overnight and, so far, the performance phase of project branding has been less than stellar, both internally and externally. There is another lesson here worth mentioning: Avoid project names that might undermine the brand, particularly at the performance phase. The term "Dreamliner" has become fodder for those who quip,"Is it just a dream?"

Payoff Payoff is the culmination of the entire branding effort. It represents an opportunity to solidify, enhance or diminish the perceptions of the project brand created in the earlier stages. Activities include closure celebrations and, in some organizations, failure parties that applaud worthwhile endeavors that did not yield the hoped-for business results.[4] If there is no clear end point, everyone grows frustrated.

A project at a large hospital provides a good example. The project was focused on a procedural problem that was affecting patient safety, but it seemed the project leader would never shake it from her "to do" list. As the complicated project dragged on month after month and the organization launched other important initiatives that vied for the same resources, keeping the team engaged became difficult. Team member turnover became an issue as the project developed a negative image. Stakeholders commented on the lack of progress and wondered about the shifting directions of the team's investigations. This lack of clarity regarding project endgame (Was it a set of recommendations? Was it a fully implemented new process?) reflected

THE PROJECT LEADER'S BRANDING TOOL KIT

We highlight the tools a project leader can apply at each stage in the project branding sequence.

PROJECT BRANDING PHASE	RELEVANT TOOLS
Pitch	•Clear problem statements, including location, timing, magnitude •Graphical representations of the performance gap •Testimonials from those affected by the problem •Attractive project work (required if the project is to be sold first to those who will do the project work and later to key decision makers)
Planning	•A communication plan: a written strategy for communicating the right information to the right stakeholders at the right time via the best medium and from the most appropriate source •Team-based approaches to planning •Project room with plan-in-process visible to those who want to see it, make comments or provide input •Update messages sent to those who want to keep abreast of planning process •Project intranet site regularly updated with plan information and vehicles that permit those interested to provide input •Presentations of the plan-in-process to relevant stakeholder groups with opportunities for comment and input
Platform	•Tangible symbols of project rollout, including project logo and other visual symbols such as posters, apparel and so on •Launch events such as lunches, presentations, parties •Team-designed elevator pitch
Performance	•Updates posted in project room or on project intranet site •Project dashboard with key metrics •Updated messages on project status crafted and distributed to relevant stakeholders
Payoff	•Formal end-of-project events that signal project completion and provide final deliverables to customers •Project close-out messages for stakeholders that describe project results, express thanks for contributions and signal the end of the project •End-of-project celebrations •Notes of appreciation to participants and their managers •Other forms of recognition for participants (article in company newsletter, e-mail to the organization, small desktop gift) •"After-action review" or other learning event focused on lessons of greatest value to this and future projects

a mishandling of the payoff phase of branding. We heard similar stories from project managers in settings ranging from industrial product design to electronics to higher education, and in all cases the project leaders agreed they should have been more assertive in defining closure expectations from the start and in more formally and definitively marking the end of the project. Failing to do so compromised their reputations and detracted from their ability to deliver on the project promise. In the absence of shared expectations about what signifies the end of the project, the project manager's ability to close the project and communicate delivery of the project's promise is hamstrung. (See "Moving Beyond On-Time, On-Budget.")

In contrast to the hospital project is an example of a closure following a failed political campaign that was branded effectively. A candidate for state attorney general in a western U.S. state lost by a small margin, only a few hundred votes. Instead of retreating and staying out of the limelight, she continued tactfully to keep herself in front of supporters and the broader state constituency by participating in television and newspaper interviews, maintaining her campaign website and communicating with those who contributed to her campaign. In a post-election letter to her financial backers and campaign volunteers, she not only thanked them for their support but also emphasized the closeness of the race and highlighted the key issues she had brought to the public's attention. She went on to describe how personally rewarding it had been to interact with the citizenry, and she promised to continue crusading for the interests and needs of families in the state. Her letter did not mention future plans to run for political office but conveyed to her supporters that they had made the right decision by advocating for her election. Although she did not use the term "branding" to describe her closure communication strategy, that is exactly what it was.

MOVING BEYOND ON-TIME, ON-BUDGET

In project environments it is common to hear the following: "The project was a success —on-time, on-budget." That reminds us of the wisecrack: "The operation was a success but the patient died." The first statement (in both cases) ignores the goal or intended business contribution of the project. It also signals the absence of a branding mindset. The 5Ps framework empowers the project leader and core team to think beyond an "on-time-on-budget" mindset and to articulate more brand-oriented metrics of success. These can range from "We were able to gain an additional 5% of market share" or "We cut defects in half" to the broader "The project enabled the organization to achieve significant stretch goals." Effective project branding requires that project leaders keep a project's intended business results on the radar screens of those whose support they need. Not only does this bolster project branding efforts, but it reminds the project leader and team not to think too narrowly about end goals (time and cost). Certainly, on-time and on-budget are valid secondary outcomes, but the bragging rights should be in the project's ability to deliver on its promise for business results.

Summary

Each project in an organization's portfolio has an internal brand — a reputation and status that play major roles in determining the level of support it will receive. Some project brands are better than others. Although the foundation of any project's brand may rest on its natural attractiveness — its strategic importance, its apparent viability, the reputation of the assigned leader and the client's profile — these factors are not the sole determinants of a project's destiny. Project leaders, sponsors and team members all have the power, and the obligation, to create and disseminate brand-related messages that clearly convey the project's intended promise, garner needed support and report on the delivery of that promise. Concepts from the domain of brand management can be tailored and applied to make this happen during five stages in the project branding life cycle. Project leaders who embrace these ideas will gain distinct advantage and be in stronger positions to achieve their goals, advance their careers and deliver on the company's business strategy.

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