Schwalbe included this graph derived from Andy Crowe’s, “The Alpha Study”.

Relative time spent per process group for “Alpha” and “non-Alpha” project managers.
This lecture is in response to the question, “What is an Alpha?”

Alpha’s are the best project managers.

What does “best” mean?

“Best” means top 2%.

What does top 2% mean?

This is what we want to discuss?

The “Alpha Study” was describe in a book by Andy Crowe.

Alpha Project Managers: What the top 2% know that everyone else does not

Andy Crowe

Andy Crowe, 2006/2008

ISBN: 0-9729673-3-8

All data and observations in this presentation are taken or derived from this book’s content. It is an easy and quick read. You should take the time to read it and form your own thoughts.
The Alpha Study had four phases.

**Find PMs and Stakeholders**
- 3000 PMs invited
- 860 met criteria

**Survey PMs and Stakeholders**
- Quantitative
- Different surveys for different groups
- Stakeholders described PMs
- PMs defined their “what’s”

**Interview PMs**
- Tried to get at the “why’s”
- Beliefs
- Experience
- Attitudes

**Post Interviews**
- All Alpha PMs and stakeholders
- Subset of non-Alphas

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**FIND:** Project managers had to meet eight criteria to participate.

- Currently managing a project
- Managed 7500 hrs in last 5 yrs
- 1 project in 12m with $75K+
- Past 3 yrs at same organization

- Supervisor participation
  - 3 team members w/500h over past year participate

- Customer from last 3 yrs participate
- PMs and stakeholders complete phases 2 and 3
**SURVEY:** The stakeholders evaluated the PMs in 10 dimensions on scale from 1 to 100.

*Rate the project manager’s overall performance at ...*

- Setting expectations
- Communicating effectively/efficiently
- Managing issues
- Managing risk
- Leadership

Meeting scope, quality, time, budget
Managing procurement process/vendors
Managing change
Balancing objectives to deliver optimal solution
Delivering a product/service/result to expectations

A weighted average was computed and the results tallied.

Candidate Alphas were to 2%
Stakeholders contacted to check accuracy of responses
Alphas were selected after recalibration
The distribution of the results were normal.

Project manager survey differed from the stakeholder survey.

- Focused on what they did and why they did it
- Did not focus on whether or not they thought they were an Alpha
- Results from both PMs and stakeholders are discussed
### Attitude and Belief

**Alpha**
- Enjoy their job more
- View project management as career
- Believe they have adequate responsibility and authority
- Have strong sense the project management is important to their current project

**Non-Alpha**
- Enjoy their job less
- Don’t view project management as career as much
- Believe they don’t have adequate authority
- View project management as less important to the project

**Supervisor views reflect PMs views.**

### Focus and Prioritization

**Alpha**
- 24% carry wireless email devices
- Reply to fewer emails quickly
- Spend ~7 hours in meetings per week

**Non-Alpha**
- 36% carry wireless email devices
- Very responsive to emails
- Spend ~9 hours in meetings per week

**Rank the managers overall responsiveness to project related request:**

- Stakeholders of Alphas : 88
- Stakeholders of Non-Alphas : 49
## Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Non-Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt they were highly effective</td>
<td>Felt they were highly effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailored communication and cared about presentation</td>
<td>Less attention to presentation and tailoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent, timely feedback</td>
<td>Sporadic and inconsistent feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rank the managers overall communication effectiveness:**

- Stakeholders of Alphas : 80
- Stakeholders of Non-Alphas : 49

## Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Non-Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believed planning is essential</td>
<td>Believed planning is essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally prefer “pure” project management role</td>
<td>Generally prefer “pure” project management role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe domain expertise as almost essential</td>
<td>Supervisors preferred “Hands-on” managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall non-Alphas spent less time</td>
<td>View domain expertise as less moderately important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Issue Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Non-Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worked to keep non-issues to remain non-issues</td>
<td>More often identified non-issues as issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue logs remain under control and handled by established process</td>
<td>Issue logs grow towards unmanageable (issue log became an issue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritized issues well</td>
<td>Didn’t have a process / prioritization scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewed issue management as essential</td>
<td>Didn’t see issue management as important as traditional issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicated issues correctly to stakeholders</td>
<td>Hid issues from stakeholders to avoid backlash</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Leadership

- Supervisors viewed lack of leadership on the part of the PM as a primary cause of project failure
  - 75% vs. 25%

- Supervisor view of PMs leadership
  - Alpha : 91
  - Non-Alpha : 60