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## The Project Management Role - Superhero? or Visionary Leader?

The project management role is arguably the most challenging of roles within the project team. As the project progresses through its various [life cycle stages](#), project manager's must be able to adapt themselves to the changing demands of the project and the team.

Much can be found on management theory and practice, when applied to projects; consequently everyone will have their own opinion, and will be right in their own contexts. That doesn't help you find you formulate a practical view based on experience.

We have distilled our experiences, beliefs, thoughts and opinions to what we believe the project management role is and the part the project manager plays in this.

First and foremost, **project management is a TEAM SPORT**, and in today's modern society it relies on the principal players of the team taking responsibility and accountability for those aspects of the project they have been charged with. Indeed, this ethos should be passed down to all team members irrespective of their level of involvement in the project.

**All Teams need a LEADER**, our view is that this is **THE principal role** of the one commonly referred to as the 'Project Manager'. We shall however, continue to refer to the principal project management role as the Project Manager.

Many organisations and project sponsors set their projects up to fail because they do not fully recognise how important the project management role is, to successfully manage a project through its [life cycle](#). It is still common that project managers are appointed on a part-time basis, the assumption being they can manage the project on a part-time basis as a stretch to their other day to day duties and responsibilities.

To successfully manage the project management process, requires full-time commitment. Though in practice 'time' may be shared with other duties and responsibilities, when it comes to the crunch, the project must get the first call when a conflict of interest arises.

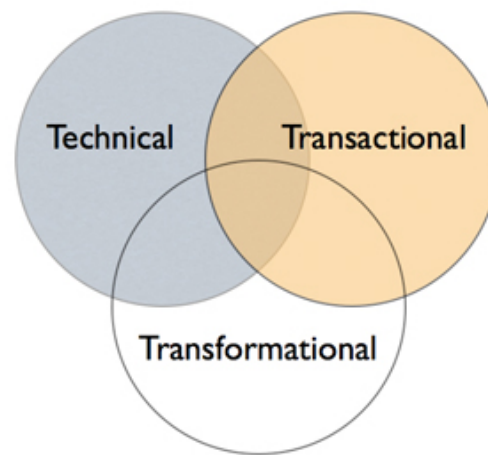
This leads nicely to the statement "**The Mission is the No.1 Priority, no-one is bigger than the Mission!**", including the Project Manager!

Provided the project sponsors are serious about their commitment to the project. The project deserves the respect of having all the stops pulled out for it, including a full-time project manager.

### The Project Management Role.

We think of the project management role consisting of 3 dimensions:

## Project Management Dimensions



### TECHNICAL

The Technical dimension, covers the more 'hands-on' role of the Project Manager. The Project Manager must be able to, and be prepared to get their sleeves rolled up and get stuck into technical issues at a detailed level. Generally, this is more so during the earlier [project definition](#) stages of the [project life cycle](#). The project Team is usually at its leanest, and all members have to get involved in progressing the detail of technical issues, or the project will stall.

**"The Devil is in the Detail"** most have heard that expression and it's 100% true when it comes to projects. **Take your eye off an understanding of the detail at your peril!**

That is to say the project manager **absolutely does NOT** need to know how to do everyone's tasks within the project, but needs to appreciate all the processes being carried out and be able to confidently challenge others at a level of informed understanding.

The Technical aspects of the project management role would include those activities needed to develop and complete the project definition, and then to implement the project in accordance with its implementation plan, controlling the project assuring the required quality of delivery.

**Being a team sport, the project management role is not necessarily the same thing as the Project Manager's role.**

For the Project Manager, depending on the size of the project, the role could include managing a team of project managers to deliver these technical aspects, or more commonly, initially carrying out a significant portion of the technical project management aspects.

### TRANSACTIONAL

The Transaction Dimension, refers to the traditional project management activities associated with managing the project's work flows and performance. Such activities would initially include establishing the project baseline metrics and parameters required to [control the project](#) during the implementation stage.

During the project implementation stage Transactional activities would

include all those project management control and reporting activities carried out regularly, needed to demonstrate control of the project. Here the Project Manager is performing foremost as a 'Manager'.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL

The Transformation Dimension refers to activities associated with leadership. Here the Project Manager is acting as the Project Leader. Softer people, relationship and communication skills need to be put to work, seeking to get the best performance from the Project Team.

This is where we believe Project Managers should be at their most effective. The project is delivered by the Team, and therefore regular ongoing Team maintenance, development and motivation are essential activities if the project is to be **SUCCESSFUL**.

This is where the **BEST Project Managers** spend the majority of their time; they realise that the performance return from their effort invested in the Team and individuals vastly increases the chances of success.

Project Managers who grasp a project with passion, and who create a sustainable buzz about the project create an environment where people feel they must be part of the Project Team, and who end up talking about being part of the project many years after its completion.

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## JUGGLING THE THREE DIMENSIONS...

Suffice to say, the Project Manager has to adopt all three of the project management dimensions, every day. Depending on the phase of the project life cycle, more time may be spent acting out specific dimensions:

During the [Feasibility Study](#), the Project Manager spends proportionately more time in the Technical and Transformational dimensions. 'Technical', when developing and challenging the scope of the project and evaluating options. Transformational when communicating the objectives and benefits expected of the project as well as the vision of what success will look like.

During the Implementation stage, the Project Manager is increasingly concerned with successfully delivering the project as defined, and operates more proportionately in the Transactional dimension, ensuring project performance is maintained at the levels required to achieve success. Transformational management skills will be employed as the team gets larger, to keep communicating the vision, to motivate, encourage and guide team members to perform whilst outside of their comfort zones.

During the Close Out stage time gets more proportionately spent back in the Technical dimension, as well as the Transactional dimension. Technical details need closing out in order to complete the project, the 'Devil is in the Detail' again. Transactional control is needed to ensure the last project activities are being completed properly and to schedule and cost.

## SUPERHERO?

It's easy to suggest that the **BEST Project Managers** need to be Superheroes. Surely, only Superheroes can juggle all those project management dimensions properly?

Well, we prefer the Project Manager to be thought of as the **Project Leader** first and foremost, because the role is much broader than a 'management' role. 'Management' tends to suggest following a set process or procedure well, and ensuring activities are delivered to the expected requirements.

Leadership suggests being able to select or create the best process and to identify the value adding activities, energising others to follow the process and to take responsibility for delivering the activities as required, whatever the challenges faced.

Arguably the best leaders are Visionary Leaders who give all credit to the Team's performance during times of success and look inwards at themselves when things do not go quite as expected, looking for ways to improve for the future. Visionary Leaders get a great sense of achievement and self satisfaction in enabling the Team to succeed. Visionary Leaders create an energised environment where people queue up to be part of the Team.

**The BEST Project Managers - Superhero or Visionary Leader? You decide!**

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## **Project Management Responsibilities.**

The Project Manager's **KEY** responsibility has to be successfully delivering the objectives and benefits the sponsor expects of the project, or the project stage the project Manager is assigned to.

All other day to day responsibilities feed into the **KEY** one. The following is a non-exhaustive list of responsibilities often referred to in a Project Manager's Role and Responsibility brief:

Ensure the following are carried out in accordance with the defined expectations:

- Progress - deliverables are being completed within the baselined time scales
- Cost - deliverables are being completed within the baselined cost plan
- Quality - deliverables are being completed to defined expectations, first time
- Performance (Value) - progress is being earned for the expected cost
- Cash flow - net project cash flow is being achieved as the defined expectations
- SHE - the required Safety, Health & Environmental standards are being achieved
- Regulatory - all required statutory and regulatory conditions are being met

- Reporting - regular and timely reporting of project progress to the sponsors
- Risk - to proactively manage foreseen project risk, mitigating as necessary
- Change - managing changes to the project without unduly affecting the stated objectives and benefits

The list can go on. Though it is worth noting that in addition to all the above there are additional **implied responsibilities**, that directly affect those stated above.

For example: **Positive Team management** - is an implied responsibility. If the Team is not led effectively, then progress, performance, quality etc will begin to suffer.

**Project Definition** - a deliverable for the first life cycle stage of the project may be to develop and produce an outline project definition via a Feasibility Study. There will be time, cost and quality expectations associated with completing this deliverable that the Project Manager, as Study Leader, will be responsible for.

For each project undertaken the Project Manager should identify, agree and document the responsibilities and the expectations of the project sponsor. These are the **Terms of Reference** for the Project Manager, against which success is measured.

**If you are currently undertaking a project management assignment without such Terms of Reference, we urge you to agree these with your sponsor as a matter of urgency.**

Without any Terms of Reference, how can you manage your perceived performance accordingly?

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## Project Management Duties.

We understand duties as the tasks or activities a Project Manager must regularly carry out in order to meet the agreed responsibilities. Again, a list can be quite long and will be closely aligned with specific Terms of Reference, but could include the following duties:

- Produce a progress report monthly
- Review the risk register monthly
- Weekly communication meetings with Team Principals
- Review weekly progress reports of Team Principals
- Approval of purchase order requisitions
- Approval of supplier invoices for payment

- Weekly telephone updates to the sponsor
- Induct new Team members into the project
- Market the project internally
- Produce a monthly project newsletter
- Maintain a project blog

And the list can go on...

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## Project Management Skills.

The 'Technical' skills required of a Project Manager, will be varied and will depend upon the nature of the project at hand.

*For example, the skills required to manage a technology driven project developing a prototype are different to those needed to deliver a project supplying proven off-the-shelf equipment to the pharmaceutical industry.*

*Also the skills required to deliver a manufacturing site development will be different to those required to deliver a cultural change project within a Bank.*

However the skills associated with the Transactional and Transformational dimensions are practically fully transferable across any industry or commercial sector and any geography. The **BEST Project Managers** should be able to manage any project.

**A common misconception:** we have an IT project, therefore we need an project manager who understands IT.

Not necessarily the smartest move.

There are excellent project managers with a wealth of experience delivering IT projects, however the Project Manager should be selected based on overall Project Management skills, not solely because they are strong in the technology or service associated with the project.

A well informed understanding of the technology or service associated with the project can be easily and quickly assimilated, however excellent cultural and communication skills cannot; they take years of practice to develop.

**The most versatile Project Managers are therefore those highly skillful in the Transactional and Transformational dimensions, and have a proven track record delivering a diverse range of projects successfully.**

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## Want more on the skills of Successful Project

**Managers...**drop us a line via [the Contact Form](#), we have a wealth of experience to share, recruiting and developing project managers.

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