

Chapter 7

The Project Manager

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Chapter

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7

7.1 Learning Objectives for this Chapter

Having completed this chapter you will be able to:

- Understand the need for the role of Project Manager
- Explain the responsibilities of the Project Manager
- Understand the need for the Project Manager role to have sufficient seniority
- Describe the desirable traits of a Project Manager
- Understand the need for a good support environment for the Project Manager

7.2 Introduction

This chapter continues our look at the people aspects of project management. Following our look at leadership in the last chapter we now look in more depth at the leader of the team – the Project Manager - why we need one, their required skills and attributes, their role and responsibilities.

7.3 The Need for a Project Manager

In the section titled “The emergence of project management in a developing company” (Chapter 9) Lock introduces a case study of a small engineering company – “Street Components Ltd”. He uses the growth and development of this company to illustrate a growing requirement for a role which would come to be called “the project manager”.

In the early days, the work of a company was organised in such a way as to ensure the steady delivery of a high volume stream of goods. The allocation and monitoring of tasks would be managed by a production manager who ensures the efficient operation of this work. The tasks would have been largely repetitive and it is likely that much of the skills and operations would be centralised in one location. The products were produced in batches or from a production line.

However, at some stage in its development, the company decides to extend its range of products and to diversify into other markets. Customers are demanding increasingly more complex and customised solutions. As more non-routine work is handled, there is a corresponding increase in complexity of design work and in the difficulty in accurately estimating costs. Increasingly the company seeks to bid for these high-value custom jobs. Later, the company will extend the range further and may also provide added-value services such as full design service and installation and commissioning services which might possibly result in the need to sub contract some work in order to be able to supply services not normally supported by the company itself. The level of planning, control and co-ordination required begins to stretch the capabilities of their normal management structures. They need a manager of projects!

In addition to the need for this new co-ordinator role, Lock demonstrates the need for a central “communicator” to channel the various flows of information that will occur as the work progresses. These flows are becoming multidirectional and constantly changing. They are also likely to flow across boundaries between functional areas of an organisation. A central role is required which will channel the communications between these temporary resources until the objectives are delivered...they need a manager of projects!

7.4 The Role and Title of the Project Manager in the Organisation

When we refer, in these notes, to a *project manager* we normally have in mind an individual whose primary job responsibility is “the managing of projects”. The job title may include the words “project” or “programme”. However someone with this responsibility is also just as likely to be called a Contract Manager, Product Manager, or Chief Engineer etc.

There are many “functional” jobs which involve major elements of project management but this may not be apparent from the job title or role description. It is often recommended that the words “project manager” be explicitly used in job titles or descriptions as this reinforces the need for a separate and distinct skill set and approach to work.

Individuals frequently become project managers “accidentally” due to their involvement in projects as part of their “normal” job. As Pinto says in his article “Lessons for an Accidental Profession”:

“Most project managers fall into their responsibilities by happenstance rather than by calculation.”

Increasingly however, organizations are identifying project management as a core business competency and indeed as a profession in its own right. The more enlightened of these companies have implemented defined career paths for the development of their project managers. Internationally the number of certified professional project managers continues to rise.

7.5 Seniority of the Project Manager

It is important that the position of the project manager within the organisation is at a high enough level to allow them to exert the appropriate influence in order to achieve the project objectives.

An appointed project manager working in most matrix type organisations will be continually required to exert influence on managers at various levels of that organization. The level of influence required will depend on the strength of the project organisation. We have seen in a previous chapter that the power of the Project Manager is low in a functional organisation and is at its highest in a fully projectised organisation. To be effective, the PM should ideally be appointed at a level equal to (or above) that of the managers he is interacting with.

Another important point made by Lock is that the responsibilities of the Project Manager may include the management of resources from external companies and the management of communications to a client. It is important therefore that the project manager is of sufficient calibre and stature to represent the company in this way.

Whatever his level in the organisation, the PM is still likely to face situations where there is a gap between his level of authority (power) and his responsibility to get the job done. The types of power which may be available to him to resolve this issue include:

- **Formal Powers:** Power due being appointed to your position. Generally has little influence within the organisation
- **Budget Power:** A powerful power! Very influential on contractors
- **Coercive Power:** Instil fear using threats of any sort – Can be seen as bullying
- **Knowledge Power:** Use of expert knowledge and access to information.
- **Reward Power:** Using positive reward for positive behaviours
- **Personal Power:** The power of a Charismatic leader

7.6 The Attributes of a Successful Project Manager

Lock lists the following particular attributes of a successful project manager:

Personality traits include:

- Ability to motivate people
- Ability to vary management style
- Displays competence
- Makes clear decisions
- Gives precise achievable instructions
- Delegates well
- Listens to and accepts sound advice
- Enthusiastic and confident

Lock pays particular attention to the role of **Perceptiveness**. By this he means the ability to review a situation or set of information, identify the relevant information and make decisions based on this.

In some cases this will involve being able to spot the information *which is missing* from what is presented to her.

This trait is developed largely through experience and is helped greatly by having a good sense of the organisation and an understanding of the individuals who are responsible for delivering the information.

This project management “sixth sense” also needs to be backed up with **General Knowledge and Awareness**. A project manager usually comes from a specialist background or discipline. If the project is solely concerned with deliverables and work relating to this specialisation then the specialist knowledge may be useful. However in his role of project manager it can be argued that he will require only enough subject-matter knowledge to allow him to plan, direct and complete the project. He should resist the temptation to dive into the detail if the “project” does not require him to. The project manager will ideally be a leader, planner and tracker of work rather than an executor of the work itself.

The other knowledge required is the general knowledge of how the organisation and its projects are administered and of relevant project management approaches and tools.

7.7 Alternative View of a Successful Project Manager

Mantel identifies a different set of attributes to bear in mind when recruiting your project manager. He also makes the following important point: not only does the PM need to possess these skills; he needs to be **perceived** to have them as well:

- Drive to complete the task: The ability to get the job done
- Technical credibility: Sufficient technical knowledge to direct the project
- Administrative credibility: That is the ability to keep the project work moving and the project processes working while balancing the conflicting objectives
- Sensitivity: this refers to an awareness of both political and personal issues and a “nose” for detecting conflict (this equates somewhat to Locks “perceptiveness”) There is also an aspect of “technical” sensitivity which allows the PM to detect issues with the work or with the product
- Leadership and Management Style (discussed in a previous chapter)
- Ability to handle stress

7.8 The Support Environment for the Project Manager

The job of the project manager will be made easier if the work environment provides support for projects. Lock outlines some desirable features of a supportive environment:

a) Commitment of senior management.

This may not be significant factor in organisations which are highly projectised. However its presence is critical in all types of organisations as it influences all the other support factors below.

b) Project Management Training

Having accepted that the skill set and methods required for project management are somewhat different to those required for normal management roles, senior management must support the ongoing development needs of their project managers. This involves formal ongoing education and training along with opportunities to network with other project managers and gain from their experience.

c) General support and awareness of the project management approach across the organisation. This is likely to follow from a) and b) above

d) The support of the project team

The team may be influenced positively by signs that projects in general are supported in the organisation and by signs that this particular project is important and supported by senior management. However, the level of support ultimately displayed by the project team is largely determined by the project manager himself and by how he uses his interpersonal and motivational skills to inspire his team and gain their respect.

e) The presence of a Project Services Group.

This group (if it exists) takes on the many of the day-to-day management and co-ordination chores for the project manager. It may also substitute in some cases for a project manager. Referring back to our previous discussion on programme offices, this group would represent a very basic use of a programme office. However, the existence of any resources dedicated to supporting projects is beneficial to the project manager.

7.9 The Role and Responsibilities of the Project Manager

The **role** of the project manager can be described in summary as:

- A facilitator of information flow
- A central point of contact
- A co-ordinator of work

Most importantly the project manager is the *single point of responsibility* for the project.

The **responsibilities** of the project manager are varied. Mantel organises them into three areas:

- Responsibility to the parent organisation
- Responsibility to the project and the client
- Responsibility to the members of the project team

(I would add an additional area - “*self* responsibility”. The project manager must ensure that the delivery of the project does not compromise his own well-being, professional development or professional ethics.)

In summary, the following list of specific responsibilities acts as a quick reference role profile for the job of project manager:

- 1) Develop and agree the definition of the project with the sponsor, client and other stakeholders
- 2) Develop the project plan
- 3) Organise, build and lead the Project team to achieve the objectives
- 4) Act as central point of contact for sponsor, team and client
- 5) Manage and report on project progress
- 6) Ensure that the project documentation exists and is keep up to date
- 7) Make sure that the project is closed and reviewed
- 8) Provide motivation, support and direction in times of confusion, misdirection or conflict
- 9) Provide development opportunities for individual team members while maximising their contribution to the project
- 10) Assign accountabilities and responsibilities to project members and stakeholders

7.10 The Vital Dozen for the Project Manager

In conclusion - Jeffery Pinto provides these 12 pieces of advice to the project manager when facing the challenges of the role. A link to the entire article is included in the references at the end of the chapter. I recommend you take time to read it – it provides a good insight into the work of the PM.

1. Understand the context of project management.
2. Recognize project team conflict as progress.
3. Understand who the stakeholders are and what they want.
4. Accept the political nature of organizations and use it to your advantage.
5. Lead from the front; the view is better.
6. Understand what "success" means.
7. Build and maintain a cohesive team.
8. Enthusiasm and despair are both infectious.
9. One look forward is worth two looks back.
10. Remember what you are trying to do.
11. Use time carefully or it will use you.
12. Above all, plan, plan, plan.



References & Resources

Lock, Dennis (2007) Project Management, 9th. Edition, Gower - Chapter 11

Meredith, Jack R and Mantel, Samuel J Jun. (2006) Project Management: A Managerial Approach, 6th. Edition, Wiley

Project Management Institute (PMI)., Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), 3rd edition, PMI

Burke, Rory, (2001) Project Management, Planning & Control Techniques, 3rd edition, Wiley

Link to Pinto's article "Lessons for an Accidental Profession – Project management":

https://d3lowemgwclw9w.cloudfront.net/content/CEPL/CEPL551/cepl551_332_1_eaderprntbl_en-us.pdf

(If this link doesn't work for you then just Google "Pinto article accidental profession")

Student Notes

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