

The Project Management Role of Non-Project Managers (A Secret to Organizational Growth)

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Leveraging project management for excellence, growth and transformation

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1.1 Abstract

It is generally thought that project management is only the project manager's responsibility. However in reality, all the team members have contributions to make towards successful project management. In addition to delivering the lowest level tasks in the project, team members can play an active role in important project management tasks. This paper discusses which project management tasks can be delegated to team members.

This paper explores why it is that project management tasks are normally not delegated by project managers to team members? Why team members may be reluctant to take on project management tasks? What are the differences in such task delegation approaches in agile projects versus waterfall projects?

This paper proposes an approach to initiate the process of delegating project management tasks to the lowest levels in the organization. It is an approach by which team members would be motivated to take up and contribute in project management tasks. It lays out the benefits this approach will provide to the organization, to the project manager, to the team members. It also proposes the benefits this will have to the country that embraces this approach.

1.2 Keywords

Secret to Organizational Growth, Innovation in Project Management Roles, Keys to Project Success, Career Success

1.3 Introduction

1.3.1 Background

I am reminded of that memorable day many years back, when I was promoted to the coveted post of 'Project Manager'. I was promoted because I had delivered a technically excellent project, one that was leading edge technology and solution at that time, and one that did my organization proud. My promotion did not have much to do with any capability I had to relate with and lead the team.

At that time I felt like a 'king', thinking that I knew everything, and that my team members did not know much. I thought the indispensable "I" had to do every important thing. I thought that the role of my team members was only writing and testing code, and other mundane activities.

Over time in my career, I found out the hard way that many of my team members had better ideas than me, had better solutions than me, and had the capacity to do much more than just delivering code and doing mundane things. They had the capacity to contribute in project management tasks.

Over even more years, after I moved into the space of training and consulting, I found that many of my clients, many of my participants of my programs, had similar experiences.



1.3.2 Organization of the Paper

In Section 2, the current situation and problem are summarized, along with the impact caused. Section 3 proposes the solution to the problem. Section 4 lists the challenges envisaged in implementing the proposed solution and lists out how to respond to these challenges. The implementation approach is discussed in Section 5, and Section 6 provides the conclusion.

1.4 The Situation

1.4.1 Current Situation

Many, if not most of the project managers do most of the project management tasks themselves. In Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) terminology's section about RACI Responsibility Assignment Matrix, project managers feel that they are both 'accountable' and 'responsible' for the project management tasks [1].

In other words, they feel that they are accountable if something goes wrong in the project, and the project management tasks. And they are absolutely correct in feeling so.

However, they also feel that they are responsible to do the actual work of project management tasks themselves. The question to think about is whether they are correct in this.

The problem that we are facing today is that organizations may not be delivering as much quantity and quality of deliverables as they could, because not many of the project management tasks are delegated to the appropriate lowest level of the organization where the project management tasks could be effectively done.

It is possible that in some instances, some project managers could be delegating project management tasks to the lowest level. But by and large this is not the practice across organizations.

1.4.2 Impact of the Situation

The impact of not delegating project management tasks to team members is multifold.

1.4.3 Project Cost

Project manager resources are not optimally utilized since project management tasks are not delegated to the lowest level possible. Hence the cost of the project goes up.

How so? Let us take a simple example. Consider the case of a project with one project manager (PM) and three team members (TMs). Let us say that the cost to company (CTC) per month for a team member is X . Let us also say for the purpose of calculation that the cost of a project manager is 50% more than the average team member, viz., $1.5 \cdot X$. Let us say that the project manager spends an average 50% time on this project, and that the project has a duration of 4 months. Table-1 shows the cost of this project.

If in this same case, some project management tasks are delegated effectively to a team member, let us see the cost implications. Let us say that the project manager now needs to spend only 25% time on this project, and as a result the number of team members required for this project is 3.25 instead of the original 3. Table-2 shows the cost in this changed scenario.

We see a benefit of cost reduction of Rs. $0.5 \times X$ when tasks are delegated to a lower level.

Resource Type	No. of Resources	Resource CTC / month (Rs.)	% Utilization	Duration (months)	Resource Cost Computation (Rs.)	Resource Cost (Rs.)
PM	1	$1.5 \times X$	50%	4	$1 \times (1.5 \times X) \times 50\% \times 4$	$= 3.0 \times X$
TM's	3	$1.0 \times X$	100%	4	$3 \times (1.0 \times X) \times 100\% \times 4$	$= 12.0 \times X$
					Total Resource Cost	= $15.0 \times X$

Table-1 Total Resource Cost Without Delegation of Project Management Tasks


Resource Type	No. of Resources	Resource CTC / month (Rs.)	% Utilization	Duration (months)	Resource Cost Computation (Rs.)	Resource Cost (Rs.)
PM	1	$1.5 \times X$	25%	4	$1 \times (1.5 \times X) \times 25\% \times 4$	$= 1.5 \times X$
TM's	3.25	$1.0 \times X$	100%	4	$3.25 \times (1.0 \times X) \times 100\% \times 4$	$= 13.0 \times X$
					Total Resource Cost	= $14.5 \times X$

Table-2 Total Resource Cost With Delegation of Project Management Tasks

It is important that this cost benefit may not be seen from the very first project that team members take up project management tasks. Like any delegated activity, this cost benefit will definitely be achieved over a period of time by when the delegate .

1.4.4 Team Motivation

The team members mainly react to tasks assigned to them. They are given specifications for pieces of work, and their job is only to deliver those pieces. They are not aware of the project management challenges the project faces, they are not involved in the estimation, in the risk identification, and other project management tasks. They don't contribute in solving project management challenges. In many cases they are not aware of the big picture of why this project is required, and are not aware of what benefits the customer, and also what benefits the customers of the customer will get when this project is implemented.



As a result, motivation levels of team members are not the best. Very often they feel that they are just putting a brick in place, and don't see the beautiful building they are building.

1.4.5 Customer Satisfaction and Quality

Since the team members are not fully engaged with the project, and also since they don't see the big picture, they are not able to catch defects in requirements early, and are not able to deliver the best solution to the customer.

This results in customer satisfaction and quality of the deliverables not being the best that they can be.

1.4.6 Business Opportunities

By the same token, team members are not able to spot business opportunities since they are not fully engaged with the project. They are not able to propose new projects and solutions that will help the customer, and that will bring more business opportunities to the team members' organization.

1.4.7 Project Manager Utilization

Since the project manager is spending expensive time doing what other team members could do, the project manager utilization is not optimum. The project manager is limited in the number of projects that can be handled at any time.

1.4.8 Organization Capacity

The impact to the organization is that the organization is not able to deliver the quantity, quality and level of value it could otherwise deliver if team members were contributing in project management tasks.

1.4.9 Country Capacity

The cascading effect at the country level is that the country's project delivery capacity in terms of quantity, quality and value is also not optimum. A country such as India could deliver more number of projects with the same number of resources, and with better quality, and most importantly add much greater value in terms of solutions to customers.

1.5 The Proposed Solution

1.5.1 The Proposed Solution Approach

The proposed solution is simple, yet if implemented, can be extremely powerful.

The proposed solution is this – project managers across the organization should delegate project management tasks to the lowest level of the organization at which these tasks can be successfully done, and they should do this with a clear conscience knowing that they are doing this in the best interest of the organization, the team members, the customers and also themselves.



1.5.2 Areas of Project Management Delegation

The question that arises is whether all project management tasks can be delegated to team members. Delegation does depend to a great extent on the capability of the delegatee. All the same portions of the following project management tasks can be delegated. Some of the project management tasks that can be delegated are given below. You may creatively come up with many more.

- ◆ Helping in identifying risks of a project
- ◆ Helping in identifying responses to risk of a project
- ◆ Helping in spotting risk triggers, and in executing the risk response
- ◆ Helping in coming up with project estimates and project timelines
- ◆ Helping in tracking progress of the project and contributing in status reporting
- ◆ Helping in solving project challenges
- ◆ Helping in proposing corrective actions to issues faced
- ◆ Helping in proposing preventive actions to avoid similar problems in future
- ◆ Coming up with innovative ideas to improve the process, the project or product
- ◆ Improving quality control so that defects are caught before they go for independent testing
- ◆ Very importantly, not accepting informal changes customers try to introduce into the scope

1.6 Concerns and Responses

If the solution is so simple, why then is this solution not happening? Why is it that project management tasks are not delegated to the lowest level possible?

I have come across genuine concerns that three types of stakeholders could have with this proposed solution. And these stakeholders are the project manager, the team member and the organization. Let us look at their concerns and how we can address them. We will also look at how the Agile approach to project delivery attempts to address these concerns.

1.7 Concerns

Let us first look at the concerns these stakeholders could have with the proposed solution.

1.7.1 Project Manager

Why don't project managers delegate project management tasks? I have found several reasons. Here are some of the reasons I personally faced, due to which I found it difficult to delegate project management tasks when I was a new project manager. I have found over the years that many of my colleagues and also my training participants and audience feel similarly.



1.7.2 Project Manager Responsibility

Project managers feel that they are the owners of their projects. They feel that it is primarily their responsibility to make the project successful, and not the responsibility of team members. So they don't delegate any project management tasks.

1.7.3 Project Manager Confidence

Project managers feel that only they have the ability and capacity to do project management tasks right, and the project team members cannot do these tasks as well as required. As a result they don't delegate project management tasks.

1.7.4 Project Manager Security

There also does exist the feeling that if others do project management tasks, the project manager role would become redundant. And because of job security fears, project management tasks don't get delegated.

1.7.5 Project Manager Concern

Project managers have a genuine concern for team members. They feel that if team members are doing project management tasks, then they would not be able to complete the other regular tasks assigned to them. And so they don't delegate project management tasks.

Now, each of these reasons is a genuine reason. We will see in the next section how we can overcome these reasons.

1.7.6 Team Members

Why don't team members want to take on project management tasks? .

1.7.7 Team Member Role

Team members feel that it is not their role to do project management tasks. Doing these tasks will be an additional burden, and they will need to work longer hours to complete these in addition to their regular tasks.

1.7.8 Team Member Benefits

Team members don't see any benefits to them, other than the longer hours they will need to work, if they take up project management tasks.

1.7.9 The Organization

Why is it that organizations, represented by the top management, may not be keen on team members taking on project management tasks?

1.7.10 Delivery Concern

Firstly the organization could have a major concern of whether with this approach, projects can be delivered on time, within budget and with quality.



1.7.11 Possible Attrition

A second concern some organizations may have is the possibility of attrition. If team members gain experience in project management tasks, would there be a greater attrition of these resources?

1.8 Addressing the Concerns

1.8.1 The Organization

Let us start with the concerns of the organization.

1.8.2 Delivery Concern

Project managers should still be held accountable for the delivery of the project on time, within budget and with quality. The balance would be allotting more team member resources to projects to the extent the project manager delegates project management tasks on one side, with moving project managers to take on more number of projects to compensate for the tasks delegated.

In effect the organization is moving project management tasks to lesser expensive resources, while at the same time ensuring project delivery standards are met.

1.8.3 Possible Attrition

There is a possibility of attrition of team member resources who have gained experience in project management tasks. But on the other hand, because of adopting this solution, the resources who continue in the organization and new resources that come on board would be high capability resources. Additionally, because of this job experience, training and empowerment provided, the organization will become an employer of choice over a period of time.

1.8.4 Project Manager

How can we address concerns of the project manager?

1.8.5 Project Manager Responsibility

Once project managers understand the benefits of delegating project management to team members such as developing them for faster growth, they can now freely, and without guilt, share their responsibility to make the project successful with the team members.

1.8.6 Project Manager Confidence

As with any delegation, when project managers start delegating, the project manager will develop increasing confidence that the team members can also do these tasks as well as required, and in many times can do them even much better.



1.8.7 Project Manager Security

Organizations value leaders who develop other leaders. Delegating project tasks helps in developing others who can replace the project manager. So such leaders need have no job security fears, because they are greatly in demand by the organization.

1.8.8 Project Manager Concern

Having a genuine concern for team members that because of additional project management tasks, they would not be able to complete the other regular tasks assigned to them is good. So like the example discussed in tables 1 and 2, project managers should try to negotiate and get additional number of resources for the project, and at the same time be willing to take on more projects. In addition, if the team members are recognized for their work and encouraged, they will be happy to take on project management tasks.

1.8.9 Team Members

And how about the concerns that team members have?

1.8.10 Team Member Role

Team members should, if possible, negotiate for reducing other tasks when taking on project management tasks. If it is not possible, team members should realize the benefits such experience can bring to their career. They should volunteer to take on project management tasks, and try to lighten the project manager's load as much as possible. Doing this increases your chances of growth financially and in rank in the organization.

1.8.11 Team Member Benefits

Team members should understand the indirect benefits that they can get by taking up project management tasks, such as becoming more visible to management, and increased changes of financial and positional growth. Keeping these in mind, it is worth investing in yourself by taking up project management tasks.

1.8.12 The Agile Approach

Being a Certified Scrum Master I have been intrigued in the way Agile handles some of these challenges. A lot of the project management tasks are automatically pushed down to team members. For example:

- ◆ Team members (workers) are largely allowed to choose the tasks of the project they prefer to take
- ◆ Workers come up with estimates, and are involved in sprint and release planning
- ◆ Workers track progress – through burndown charts
- ◆ Workers are exposed to the customer, especially during the sprint demo, where they could get the praise of the customer or the wrath of the customer
- ◆ Workers raise risks during daily stand-up meetings



1.9 Implementing the Solution

Implementing the solution should ideally be done top-down. This means that the organization, which refers to the top management of the organization should set the direction of implementing this solution. Then the project managers and then the team members can embrace the implementation by doing their roles of delegating more and accepting more delegated tasks respectively.

1.10 The Levels of Implementation

1.10.1 At the Organization (Top Management) Level

- ◆ Allow project managers to delegate responsibilities of project managers, but still be held accountable for the project success.
- ◆ Reward project managers according to the value they bring to the organization in terms of the number of projects they handle, and the high value solutions they offer to customers. Project managers who embrace this approach would therefore have a greater chance at greater responsibilities and recognition, and faster career growth.

1.10.2 At the Project Manager level

- ◆ Delegate more project management tasks to the lowest level at which these tasks can be successfully done.
- ◆ Offer to, and take up more number of projects, at the same time ensuring that because of the empowerment and inclusion of team members, the value added to projects increase and you also get more business opportunities from your clients.
- ◆ You would need however, to negotiate for increased number of team members or longer timelines to be able to delegate project management tasks.
- ◆ Although you offer to take up more projects, at certain times, there may not be more projects to take up. But your offer will make you visible to your management, and when future opportunities come, you will be on their radar for fast growth.


1.10.3 At the Team Member Level

- ◆ Look out for opportunities to take up project management tasks
- ◆ If they don't seem to be available, offer your services to your project manager to help in project management tasks. This will make you more visible to your management and will help you in attaining fast growth.

1.10.4 Training and Rollout Across the Organization

The approach this paper proposes requires a mindset change.

Short 2 to 4 hour training programs can be arranged for project managers and team members. Use the Snowballing methodology [2] to roll this out across the organization. Each participant who undergoes the training would be required to do the following two tasks within ten days of the training:

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1. Submit three real-life case studies or illustrations of how this training was implemented. This should be signed off by the participant's supervisor.
 2. Disseminate the learning from the training to 3 other colleagues of his choice. These three are required to complete these same two tasks within ten days of being trained.

1.11 Conclusion

If organizations, project managers and team members embrace this approach of delegating more project management tasks to the lowest level of the organization at which these tasks can be successfully done, the benefits that can be derived are astounding. The benefits to the **five** main stakeholders are below:

1. Benefits to team members: Team members who take up project management tasks would also grow faster since they are growing in capability faster, and are adding greater value to their projects.
2. Benefits to project managers: Project managers who delegate project management tasks in this way would also grow faster since they will be able to be responsible for more projects, and would be delivering high quality, high value projects.
3. Benefits to customers: Customers get better value solutions of high quality because the team tried to solve the customer's problem, and not just deliver to requirements without understanding the need of the project.
4. Benefits to organizations: The profits of the organization will improve since a greater number of successful and higher value projects can be delivered with the same number of resources. Customer satisfaction will increase, and so will employee satisfaction.
5. Benefits to the country: With organizations adopting this approach, the country will also be able to deliver higher quality projects with higher customer value and satisfaction, all with the same number of resources. The country can move up the value chain in terms of the solutions it can provide, and so get projects of greater profitability.

Ultimately, this simple yet powerful approach could be a win-win-win-win-win for the five stakeholders listed.

1.12 References

- [1] A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide) – Fourth Edition, PMI Publications, 2008, pp 221
- [2] Rao, Madhavan S., Steering Project Success – Simple Innovations in Execution, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 2007, pp 3

1.13 Author's Profile



Binod Maliel has nearly two decades experience in the IT industry, and has held senior management positions both in India and overseas. He has worked with iFlex, ABN Amro, Citibank, and Mphasis BFL. Binod has led large teams and delivery operations across multiple countries, being responsible for multiple clients, for end-to-end project delivery, for managed services and delivery centers. He has successfully implemented solutions in diverse technical and business environments using project management and business analysis processes, including practices found in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide).

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1.13.1 Certifications and Affiliations

Binod is a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI®), and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®) by PMI. He is a Certified Scrum Master (CSM). He has a Certificate of Achievement in Leadership from the American Management Association* (AMA), USA. He has been trained to train in accelerated adult learning techniques by AMA. He is a life member of the Computer Society of India (CSI), life member of the National Human Resource Development Network (NHRD), and life member of Bangalore Management Association (BMA). He is a member of Toastmasters International. He has also received the "Gold Star Contributor" recognition from PMI Bangalore chapter for his contribution to them in Project Management training.