

Motivation in Project Management: The Project Manager's Perspective

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ABSTRACT ■

Project motivation is a key aspect to a successful project, yet few studies exist that shed light on this important subject. This article reviews the current literature and theoretical aspects of motivation and provides an analysis of the data. A survey was conducted by soliciting project managers to tell how they perceive their ability to influence motivation. In total, 115 certified project managers responded to the survey. A discussion and suggestions for future research follow the data.

KEYWORDS: project motivation; project management professional; certified project manager

INTRODUCTION ■

The financial stability of every company depends upon the successful management of resources dedicated to completing projects within a predetermined budget. Although the total number of project management professionals (PMPs) currently registered with the Project Management Institute (PMI®) is 202,514 (PMI, 2006), certified project managers are still in high demand because of the training they receive to manage projects. For example, the success of a project hinges on the ability of a project manager to ensure timely delivery, adhere to budget constraints, and manage scope and quality specifications. A project manager may have the necessary skills to guide a project team through various project stages and project life cycles, but team motivation—something far less tangible—is an essential element of a successful project.

PMI's *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (PMI, 2004) emphasizes that the interpersonal skills needed to motivate a project team are a project manager's most important asset. Whether a project team is highly motivated to attain a project's goal can make the difference between a smooth project progress and one that is bogged down with complications. The idea of a motivated project team may seem to be a common-sense matter but can be difficult for project managers to easily understand because definitions of motivation vary among researchers. For example, Huszycz's (2004) view of motivation is centered on expectations and reinforcements, whereas other researchers have explained motivation as a level of energy employees bring to work (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Welbourne, Andrews, & Andrews, 2005). The various explanations of motivation have left psychologists, managers, coworkers—and most people in general—struggling to understand what motivates people (Schwalbe, 2004).

The ability of a project manager to work with a team and achieve goals is critical to the success of an organization. Successful project management is more than simply working within predefined project management constructs and techniques; yet, understanding how motivation works from the project manager's perspective remains unclear. This research includes a literature review of motivation in project settings that may increase or decrease team motivation. The results of the current research explore currently held perceptions by project managers to formulate successful techniques that can help create a motivated team.

Leadership and Motivation

When engaging in a difficult or complex project, the obvious question a project manager may ask is, "How do I motivate my team members?" Interestingly, some research indicates that this question may be a step in the wrong direction. For example, a study that surveyed 135,000 employees at 40 organizations concluded that asking such a question may be counterproductive (Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005). According to the conclusions of this study, "most people enter a new organization and a job with enthusiasm, eager

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to work, to contribute, to feel proud of their work and their organizations" (Sirota et al., p. 15). This suggests that approaching motivation may be better served by focusing on specific team tasks or roles (Ambrose & Kulik, 1999) rather than motivation as a willingness issue. For example, the *PMBOK® Guide* defines motivation in project settings as "energizing people to achieve high levels of performance and to overcome barriers to change" (p. 27), but the basis of the PMI certification is to ensure that project managers have mastery of the proper skills and techniques.

Motivation, then, seems to suggest something more than simply doing the right kinds of things. In organizational settings, leadership involves getting others to do something that needs to be done, but not necessarily through coercion (Lewis, 2003, p. 3) or by being a taskmaster. Schwalbe (2004) contended that any discussion of influence inevitably leads to the topic of power, which she defined as "the potential ability to influence behavior to get people to do things they would not otherwise do" (p. 351). Power can be characterized as coercive (threats or punishment), legitimate (based on authority of position), expert (based on knowledge), reward (e.g., incentives, recognition), and referent (based on charisma). Interestingly, employing one or more of these strategies may get results, but the effects they have on the motivation of team members can be very different. For example, Sirota et al. (2005) found that the use of autocratic, coercive, or laissez-faire management styles are detrimental to employee satisfaction. Other leadership models that rely less on power and influence frame the role of a successful team leader as "initiator, model, negotiator, and coach" (Luecke, 2004).

One management style that has been proven to enhance motivation is the participative leadership style (Ellemers et al., 2004; Sirota et al., 2005). Whether team members perceive a manager as a participant or an autocratic

leader will guide how they will respond to the manager's attempts to raise motivation. According to Ellemers et al. (2004), "motivation to cooperate with a leader who is seen as an out-group member depends on how rewarding the exchange relationship is for the subordinate—loyalty to an in-group leader emerges more unconditionally" (p. 467). In addition, a manager's ability to create shared identity guides whether their attempts to energize the whole team will be successful (Ellemers et al., 2004). Leary-Joyce (2004) referred to the participative leadership style as servant leadership: "For real involvement, people need to see the value, excitement and challenge of what they do. Command-control leaders tell. Servant leaders include, discuss, take ideas, look for ways to help people come on board, and celebrate every success that comes along" (p. 39).

Sources of Motivation

Management styles are either inclusive or exclusive, and are thought to change team motivation from internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic) sources. Peters and Waterman (1983) found that large organizations with a successful track record over many years distinguish themselves from the rest by focusing on the individual employee and the development of intrinsic motivation. So what exactly is the difference between an extrinsically and an intrinsically motivated employee? Gagne and Deci (2005) put it best when they explain:

Intrinsic motivation involves people doing an activity because they find it interesting and derive spontaneous satisfaction from the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, requires an instrumentality between the activity and some separable consequences such as tangible or verbal rewards, so satisfaction comes not from the activity itself but rather from the extrinsic consequences to which the activity leads. (p. 331)

The Latin phrase *labor ipse voluptas*, which stands for *work labor in itself*

conveys pleasure, is another way to explain intrinsic motivation (Frey, 1997). To illustrate that motivation can be understood as a continuum between amotivation (lack of motivation) and intrinsic motivation (completely self-determined), Gagne and Deci (2005) related work motivation to the self-determination theory (SDT).

At the heart of SDT lies the distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation occurs when the individual has a choice. Gagne and Deci (2005) explained that autonomous motivation is essentially intrinsic motivation because the person engages in an activity volitionally. Controlled motivation, in contrast, implies that the person has to engage in an action due to some outside influence (e.g., the boss says so). The self-determination continuum (Figure 1) illustrates the five different types of motivation SDT describes. Amotivation on the left side completely lacks self-determination. Intrinsic motivation, on the other side of the continuum, is fully self-determined. Furthermore, self-determination theory distinguishes between four types of extrinsic motivation: external, introjected, identified, and integrated.

External regulation is an example of controlled motivation that lacks self-determination. For example, an externally regulated person might only work for a specific reward or feedback associated with the work. Through a process called internalization, a person can turn extrinsically motivating aspects into intrinsically stimulating elements by making them more personal. Internalization is defined as "people taking in values, attitudes, or regulatory structures, such that the external regulation of a behavior is transformed into an internal regulation and thus no longer requires the presence of an external contingency" (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 334).

Although the internalization process illustrates different categories of integration, SDT does not propose that a person has to follow through all

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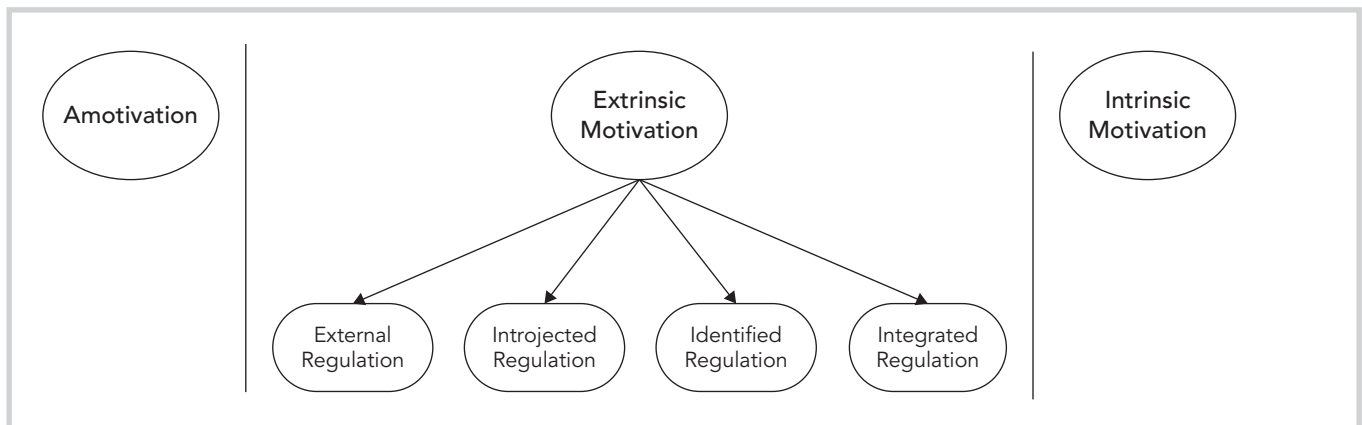


Figure 1: This Gagne and Deci (2005) model illustrates the continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation [p. 336].

stages to integrate a regulation. SDT should not be understood as a theory of stages where one level has to be satisfied before the next one can be attained (e.g., Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [1954], reviewed later on). Rather, SDT proposes that extrinsic motivation can come very close to intrinsic motivation when external factors are internalized (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Another interesting finding concerning intrinsic motivation is the spillover effect. Frey (1997) explained that in closed groups such as temporary project teams, but also families, intrinsic motivation can be affected by others in the group. If one person's intrinsic motivation is alienated or "crowded-out," then the lower motivation of that person may spill over to other project members and thereby lower the overall motivation level of the whole project team.

Optimizing Energy

Deming (1988) explained that every process in an organization is subject to variation. He stressed that instead of trying to maximize production, morale, or other aspects of organizations, managers should strive to optimize according to natural variation of the processes. Covey (1990) advocated a similar approach, less focused on manufacturing but created for human beings, that he called P/PC balance. He explained that for anything to be productive (P) it

also has to have production capability (PC maintenance). In other words, mere maximization of employee motivation will bring negative consequences because laws of nature teach us that what goes up must come down.

Welbourne et al. (2005) explored this theory by studying employee motivation as a level of energy that has to be optimized in order to be most effective. Just as overtraining in the athletic world will lead to injury, burnout, or other negative side effects, so will overmotivation take its toll over time. Welbourne et al. (2005) specifically stated that "too much motivation or energy can lead to detriments in long-term performance, as is poignantly captured in the Japanese phenomenon of *karo-jisatsu* (death through overwork)" (p. 56). Welbourne et al. (2005) also found that although the concept of *more is not always better* seems to be common sense, well-established motivation theories have deemphasized that aspect of motivation. Gagne and Deci (2005) reported in their meta-review that motivational concepts have been proven to be both additive and subtractive but did not point to any research that suggests an optimization of employee energy.

The evidence from the Welbourne et al. (2005) study shows that there is an optimum zone of employee energy or motivation that should not be surpassed, and that it is unique for each

individual. A manager can, however, help an employee stay in the zone or even aid to elevate it a bit. Another insight Welbourne et al. received from the managers who participated in their study was that simple interventions and an increase of communication with the employee can make tremendous differences in employee energy. Practical advice that can help managers understand and work with employee motivation better will be examined next. Specifically, we will examine areas researchers and management theorists have identified as especially applicable to team motivation.

Autonomy

Being capable of and allowed to manage themselves is one of the most important needs and requirements of the knowledge worker according to Drucker (1999). When participants were given autonomous control (operator control) in the Wall, Corbett, Martin, and Clegg (1990) study, increased performance, increased intrinsic job satisfaction, and decreased job pressure were reported. The finding that autonomy creates greater employee satisfaction is also congruent with studies on the goal-setting theory, which found that self-set goals are more desirable (Ambrose & Kulik, 1999). According to Bakke (2005), decisions that are made at the top are basically lost chances to delegate responsibility. Luecke (2004)

explained that when a manager specifies ends and means to a task, a waste of human resources and decline in motivation occur.

If the manager instead only specifies ends and allows the individual or team to develop their own means, stronger motivation and a heightened work morale will manifest itself. According to Ambrose and Kulik (1999), research addressing action regulation theory has also found that autonomy (decision latitude) results in maximal motivation. Deci, Connell, and Ryan (1989) found that managerial autonomy support, offering choice, and encouraging self-initiation are associated with high levels of job satisfaction. In addition, Deci et al. (1989) reported that providing feedback in a noncontrolling way can have similar effects. Feedback may therefore be another area where project managers can positively influence motivation.

Feedback

The general consensus regarding effectiveness of feedback is that positive constructive feedback enhances employee motivation (Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Gagne & Deci, 2005; Huszycz, 2004; Lewis, 2003). Lewis (2003) also explained that those who contribute the most in a project are usually the ones most in need of appreciation. Feedback can also enhance positive effects of other motivational techniques such as goal setting. Latham and Locke (1991) and Locke (1996) found that goal setting is enhanced when feedback is given in a way that illustrates the progress that has been made toward the goal. The team member's perception of feedback also plays a role in its effectiveness. Just as employee perception of managers plays an integral role in the effectiveness of different management styles, so is the influence of feedback heavily influenced by the receiver's perceptions.

According to Ambrose and Kulik (1999), autonomy also plays a role in feedback because "feedback from an

external source is expected to lower intrinsic motivation if it is perceived by the individual as 'controlling,' but not if it is perceived to be 'competence' feedback" (p. 254). Gagne and Deci's (2005) meta-review highlighted that negative feedback can undermine both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, leaving people unmotivated. Negative feedback should therefore be carefully evaluated before it is given.

Whatever the individual approach to feedback, Huszycz (2004) pointed out that the "system of reinforcement must be good for the overall organization and not just for the team you are motivating" (p. 204). However, a system of reinforcement does not only include verbal feedback. Tangible rewards can also be considered feedback but need special attention because their impact can make or break motivation even more than verbal feedback.

Rewards and Recognition

The overall philosophy of rewards (extrinsic motivation) and recognition (intrinsic motivation) is to motivate the employee and to let the employee stand out. Peters and Waterman (1983) found that successful companies make it an organizational goal to let their employees stand out by repeatedly recognizing their contributions. Lewis (2003) pointed out that showing appreciation through a paycheck alone may not be enough. According to Lewis (2003), rewards create compliance and not commitment. A meta-review by Deci et al. (1999) analyzing 128 laboratory experiments found that while positive feedback increases intrinsic motivation, rewards can significantly undermine it. Frey (1997) related the latter finding to the situation of being invited to dinner at a friend's house and then offering the friend money afterward. That offer will not only be declined, but it will more than likely be seen as an insult.

However, Gagne and Deci (2005) reported that not all rewards undermine motivation. Specifically, Gagne

and Deci stated that studies have shown "when rewards are given independent of specific task engagement (as might be the case with salary) or when the rewards were not anticipated (as might be the case with unexpected bonuses), tangible extrinsic rewards did not undermine intrinsic motivation" (p. 332). Luecke (2004) advocated that rewards in a team should give incentives for good performance on the team. Such team rewards should go beyond regular employee recognition and should specifically target accomplishments made in and for the team. Luecke (2004) explained that if used correctly, rewards can be a great tool to help align behavior to team goals. A manager should, however, be aware that team-specific rewards can create potential conflicts.

Team-based rewards can create a conflict with the individual's traditional work assignment, as was pointed out by Luecke (2004) and Dunn (2001). The manager further has to decide whether rewards should be given to all team members or if he or she should focus on individual contribution. The first approach will bring along the risk of free riders who may be rewarded without having significantly contributed to the project. However, both Deming (1988) and Drucker (1999) pointed out that individual rewards will inevitably create competition and will eventually lower productivity and morale. Peters and Waterman (1983) found that successful companies repeatedly make at least 80% of their employees winners, which would also suggest a team-based over an individual reward system.

Rewards should also follow the guidelines of equity theory. According to Ambrose and Kulik (1999), "research in the 1990s consistently demonstrated that underpayment inequity was associated with negative attitudes; however, there continues to be ambiguity about the effects of overpayment inequity" (p. 242). Deming (1988) explained that the popular merit system is one of the major sources of inequity and

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competition. A study by Deckop and Cirka (2000) found that when a merit-pay program was introduced in a non-profit organization, decreased feelings of autonomy and intrinsic motivation were reported. Reward structures and reinforcement systems are therefore areas that can influence employee motivation, both positively and negatively. Project managers will have to judge which approach is most appropriate depending on the makeup of the stakeholders who are involved in a project.

Summary of Project Manager's Perspective

To recap, project managers can influence team motivation through the use of power and the application of various leadership styles. The aim for intrinsic motivation will be most beneficial because the team member will be connected to the cause or goal of the project, instead of the reward that is attached to it. In addition, a project manager should attempt to influence motivation in a way that optimizes it instead of trying to maximize motivation. Direct applications that can be used to influence motivation are allowing autonomy, giving feedback, and offering rewards. Although these areas give general directions for how a project manager can influence motivation, they do not point to specific techniques that aim at the development of intrinsic motivation of team members in project settings. Research question two (R2) will therefore investigate which techniques project managers find particularly successful to develop high levels of intrinsic team motivation in project settings.

The discussion of motivation of project teams would be incomplete without the consideration of the organization in which the project team operates. According to PMI (2004), projects operate in hybrid situations where team members belong to a team and an overarching organization at the same time. Both put demands on the team member, and both can influence the

motivation level of the individual. Depending on what kind of project type the team operates in (weak or strong project matrix), the influence of the organization can be more or less constraining. Traditional motivation theories have mostly concerned themselves with motivation of employees in a larger organization. The following section examines motivation of individuals from the perspective of the overarching organization and its general impact on employees.

Organizational Perspective on Motivation

According to Drucker (1999), managers have to understand that the vast majority of workers in the 21st century are knowledge workers who have fundamentally different needs than manual workers. Drucker sees the enhancement of knowledge workers' productivity and motivation as the most important challenge of the 21st century. Both Drucker (1999) and Deming (1988) believed that one of the core elements knowledge workers must have is pride of workmanship. It is a challenge for managers to help employees develop such a feeling, especially because knowledge work is usually detached from products that are produced by a company.

The extensive study done by Sirota et al. (2005) found three factors that are strongly associated with employees' overall satisfaction with their organization: equity ($r = 0.59$), achievement ($r = 0.43$), and camaraderie ($r = 0.36$). Equity in this study refers to physiological, economic, and psychological fairness. Achievement stands for pride in one's accomplishments, recognition, and doing things that matter, and camaraderie refers to a cooperative work environment that makes an organization not just a business entity, but also a community. The correlation data was derived from several studies, which included a wide demographic and surveyed employees in North America and Europe.

Contrary to the researchers' expectations, these three factors stayed consistently significant, no matter which ethnic group, cultural group, gender, or level in an organization individuals belonged to. These findings go along with Ambrose and Kulik's (1999) meta-review, which also reported that no consistent patterns of cultural differences or similarities can be found by reviewing motivation research in the 1990s. Sirota et al. (2005) reported that correlation coefficients for equity were consistently in the .50s to .60s, achievement in the .40s, and camaraderie in the .30s to .40s (all beyond the 0.00001 level of significance). However, these studies did not focus primarily on motivation in teams, but also included traditional, hierarchical management structures, and satisfaction with employees' day-to-day work routines.

Project Team Motivation vs. Organizational Motivation

What distinguishes management of projects from general management is that it revolves around a temporary team under the guidance of a temporary leader, the project manager. The preceding literature review highlights that motivation can be equally influenced by the project manager and the overall organization. The question resulting from this duality of forces onto the individual team members is: Can a project manager influence team motivation positively despite overall organizational influences? In other words, can a project manager encourage high intrinsic team motivation even if the overall organization creates a culture of low motivation (R3)?

Another factor that makes project management different from general management is that it goes through various project stages, namely: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and control, and closing (Project Management Institute, 2004). Because project management and team development revolve around stages, different approaches may have to be taken depending

on the current stage a project is in. The progressive stage development nature of projects was also related to the development of the team itself. Tuckman (1965) found that small groups go through four stages (forming, storming, norming, and performing) during the course of the group's existence to accomplish a task or project. With this model of team building in mind, Huszczo (2004) proposed that a project manager should recognize that different motivational approaches may be called for depending on what stage the team is in. The current investigation of project managers' perceptions will also address different stages and how they may relate to motivation of project teams (R4).

Research Questions

Based on the preceding review of motivational research regarding a project manager's ability to influence motivation, we can see that much research has been done in the general area of motivation and its more specific applications in organizational behavior. Both Gagne and Deci (2005) and Welbourne et al. (2005) remarked that more research is needed to understand managers' perceptions regarding their ability to influence motivation. The current study more specifically focuses on the micro-level project team and project managers' perceptions regarding motivation in project settings and attempts to shed light onto the following research questions:

1. Which factors most commonly provoke low levels of team motivation in projects?
2. What are successful motivation techniques for project settings that focus on the development of intrinsic motivation?
3. Can a project manager motivate a team despite the overall organizational culture?
4. Should motivation techniques be applied differently depending on the stage of a project?

Methodology

The goal of the present research is to assess project managers' perceptions of team motivation. To gather this information, a multipart questionnaire was developed that included questions in a Likert-scale format, force-choice questions, and a section that allowed respondents to write statements to clarify their checkbox answers. Once the questionnaire was designed, several project managers from the local PMI chapter were asked to examine the questionnaire and provide feedback. As it turned out, the comments provided by these industry experts were helpful in reformatting questions, thereby improving the instrument.

The questionnaire was distributed in an HTML format and made available through SurveyZ.com, an online survey-distribution service. Because of the difficulties associated with identifying project managers individually, an invitation to participate in a research study was drafted and distributed through the PMI online research network. Project managers had access to the questionnaire link in the research section of the PMI Web site. The link was available to members of PMI who are interested in research regarding project management. To call attention to the questionnaire, PMI chapter presidents were sent an invitation to participate with a request to distribute the link to the survey through the e-mail list of their regional chapter.

Response rates were monitored through page views, the number of started questionnaires, and the number of completed questionnaires. Features available on the SurveyZ.com Web site allowed the researcher to prevent ballot stuffing and to track the IP addresses of the respondents as an added measure. Tracking this information allowed the researcher to purge duplicate IP addresses (and the related questionnaire responses) from the data set used in the analysis of the results.

The qualitative statements were collected and compiled in a single data

file. The statements made by the respondents were analyzed for thematic uses of phrases and keywords by the use of Catpac, a qualitative research tool that creates frequencies of keywords and illustrates contextual relationships. The keyword frequencies were used to create thematic categories, or groupings to add context to the checkbox answers.

Results

The PMI online network for survey distribution turned out to be an effective means to contact project managers. The placement of the link provided exposure to the PMI community. Using e-mail to contact potential respondents presented some interesting challenges. The invitations to participate in the questionnaire were sent by a third party so it was not possible to determine how many regional list managers distributed the invitations or how many members in each chapter had opted in to the e-mail lists. While e-mail is a convenient method to contact a large audience, using e-mail to contact potential respondents presents challenges. Many people simply do not want unsolicited e-mail and discard unfamiliar messages unread. Though this method of making contact presented challenges, 343 unique page views were noted, with 115 respondents who completed all survey questions.

Of the 115 respondents who completed all questions of the survey, 64% were male and 36% were female. There was a relatively even split between respondents who operate in the private sector (54%) and those who work in the public sector (46%). The largest concentration of respondents was working in the information technology (15%) and consulting services (10%) business areas. An overwhelming majority of respondents were from North America (77%), followed by 13% from Asia. The remainder of the respondents were from Europe, Australia, and Africa.

The project manager respondents tended to be very experienced and

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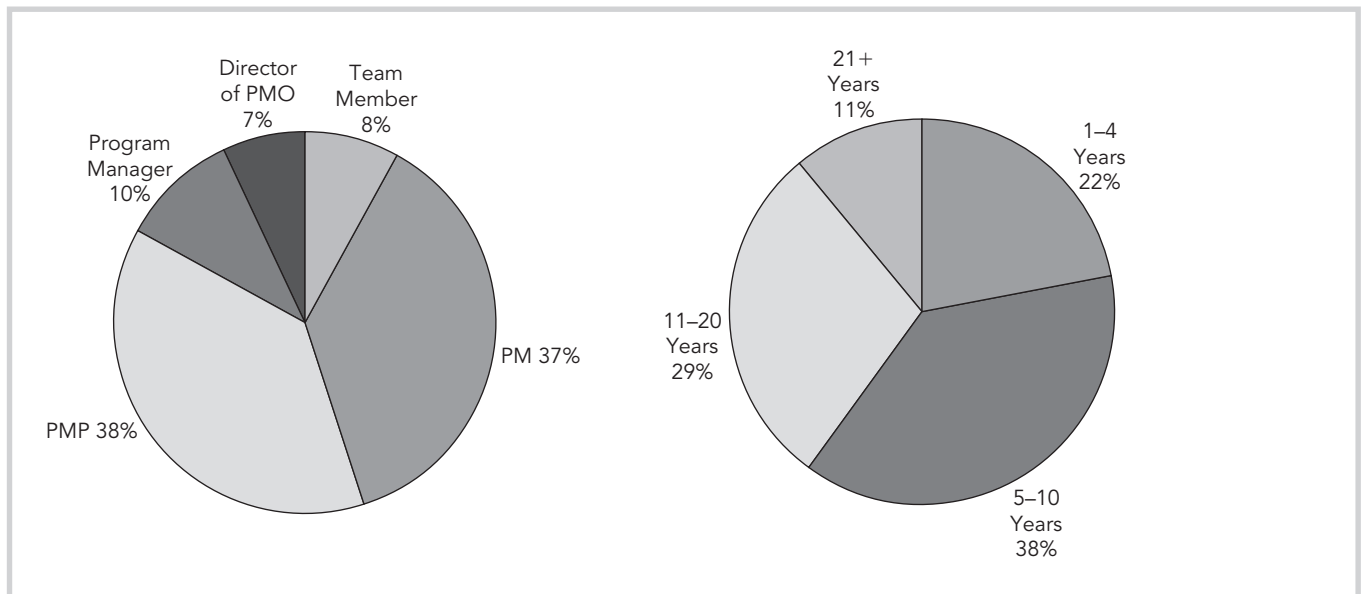


Figure 2: Project management rank and years of experience demographics.

work in environments that handle large-scale projects (see Figure 2). The largest concentration of respondents ($N = 46$) had more than 10 years of experience in project management, and 44 had worked as project managers for 5–10 years. Only 25 respondents had 1–4 years of experience in project management. Over a third of the respondents ($N = 39$) managed projects worth more than \$1 million (U.S.). Only 22 reported that their project was worth less than \$100,000 (U.S.). The majority ($N = 54$) indicated projects ranging from \$100,000 to \$600,000 (U.S.) with

project teams consisting of less than 10 members ($N = 81$).

Motivation, Type of Organization, and Project Stages

Research Question 1 (R1) explores which factors most commonly provoke low levels of team motivation in project settings. To measure the organizational authority, the project managers were asked to select the structure type of the organization where they last managed a project (Schwalbe, 2004, p. 47). A surprising number ($N = 68$) reported that they worked in an environment

that gives the project manager little legitimate authority (functional organization or a weak matrix). Only 25 respondents reported that they worked in an environment with strong legitimate authority (strong matrix or project organization). The remainder ($N = 22$) worked in a balanced matrix environment where the project manager splits authority with the functional manager. Table 1 illustrates which factors project managers indicated they perceive to have the greatest impact lowering motivation, arranged by type of organization.

Factors Lowering Team Motivation in Projects	Type of Organization				
	Functional	Weak Matrix	Balanced Matrix	Strong Matrix	Project
Missing top management support	18	26	12	8	10
Personal conflicts between team members	11	19	7	4	7
Inequity in reward system	6	18	5	4	4
Schedule conflicts	5	11	11	1	4
Time overruns	3	7	4	3	2
Note. Respondents were allowed to pick more than one factor.					

Table 1: Factors lowering team motivation.

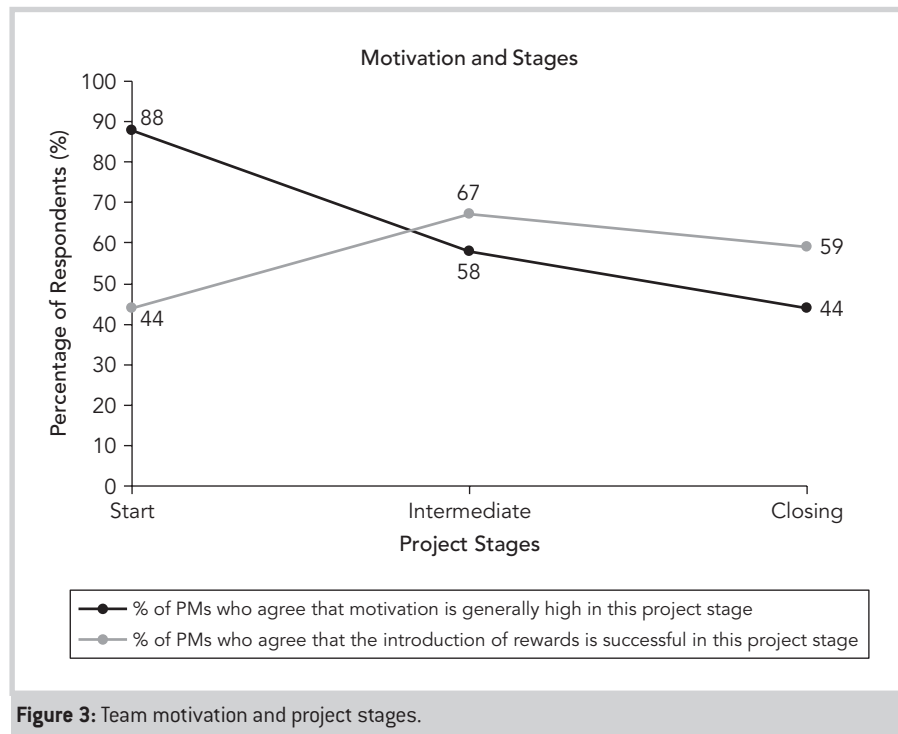
(Negative Impact)	Frequency
Scope	74
Time	51
Quality	24
Cost	10
Changes in constraints do not affect motivation	7
Note: Respondents were allowed to pick more than one factor.	

Table 2: Change in project constraints.

The project managers were asked to indicate how they perceive the impact of change on motivation. This section of the questionnaire asked the project managers to identify, in their experience, which of the major project constraints of scope, time, cost, and quality has the greatest negative impact on team motivation. While changes in one constraint will inevitably provoke changes in the other constraints, changes in *scope* appeared as the prevalent factor affecting team motivation (see Table 2).

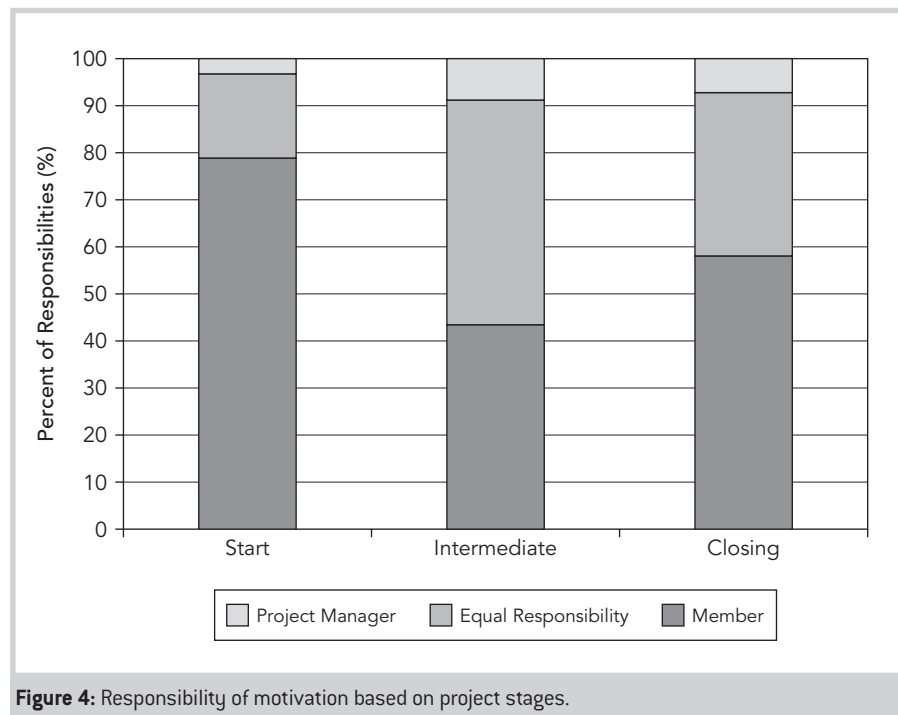
Because projects move through stages, the importance of motivation may fluctuate in conjunction with the project stage. Research Question 4 (R4) investigates the importance of project stages in team motivation. Figure 3 illustrates the perceived importance of motivation based on the three general project stages: start (initiating, planning), intermediate (executing), and closing. The chart shows that team motivation declines as the project progresses. A large majority (88%) of the respondents agreed that motivation is usually high during the start of a project. In contrast to this figure, only 44% ($N = 39$) of the respondents found team motivation to be high toward the closing stage of a project.

Project managers have the ability to influence team motivation, but supporting actions by the project manager may not be called for in each project



stage. Figure 4 illustrates the project manager's perceptions regarding the responsibility of team motivation based on the three project stages. The chart also illustrates the effectiveness

of rewards based on the three global stages. It appears that the introduction of rewards is more successful during the intermediate and closing stage of a project than during the project start.



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Figure 4 shows 79% of the project managers believed that it is the project manager's responsibility to stir team motivation at the beginning of a project. During the intermediate phase, this number declines to 44%, moving the responsibility to both the project manager and the individual team member. Toward the end of the project, slightly more than half (58%) of the respondents expressed that the responsibility lies with the project manager.

Motivation, Member Participation, and Team Culture

Research Question 2 (R2) explores motivation techniques that project managers have found to be successful. In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to describe what promotes team motivation. The answers were compiled and analyzed using a content analysis. Categories were developed using keyword frequencies. In turn, the categories were reexamined in the context of the comments. Interestingly, the comments appeared to center on issues pertaining to communication. For example, the keyword *communication*, along with *project team*, appeared in statements that referred to clear communication with stakeholders. More specifically, the comments stressed that a project manager needs to be a good communicator, both formally and informally. In multiple-choice questions, an overwhelming number (93%) of respondents agreed that providing positive, constructive feedback is a successful motivation technique. Engaging team members in personal conversations was also seen as a strong motivational technique by a majority of respondents (77%).

The keyword *participation* was also associated with team communication. In the multiple-choice questions, most of the project managers (90%) believed that having team members participate in the creation of the work-breakdown structure is a strong technique for motivation. This seems to imply that a

sense of ownership through a shared vision is critical to developing a highly motivated project team. The following statements are examples of this theme in context:

Engaging the project team in the decision making as much as realistically possible. Setting their expectations properly right from day one and ensure transparency/accountability in all activities.

Each team member was a stakeholder in the success of the project. They were there from kickoff to closure.

Team members were involved in all stages of planning and execution. They understood the integration of all components and the effect their role had on the success of the whole project.

The qualitative analysis highlights that intrinsic factors such as communication, involvement, and trust appear to be successful techniques to create a highly motivated project team. For example, the last theme that emerged in this category was *trust* and how project members can convey it. A majority (59%) of the participating project managers agreed that letting team members develop their own ways to produce deliverables is a good way to create a motivated team. The implication seems to be that if team members participate in the development of goals and

expectations, successful project managers need to follow through with a sense of trust that the team has made effective decisions. One project manager found it important to *"give [the team] responsibility and trust. Accept errors and give them the chance to fix it."*

Motivation can be equally influenced by the project manager and the social milieu of an organization. While other layers of an organization such as support from management and client-generated scope changes contribute to the overall culture of a work environment, factors that help to form a sense of team culture include organizational strategy, project purpose, objectives, and commitment to project goal. These factors have the potential to undermine the best laid plans. In spite of these potential obstacles, the majority (63%) of project managers indicated that it is possible to motivate a team even if the overall culture has a negative effect on employee motivation (R3). This number may provoke the thought that the other 38% simply do not know how to motivate a team, but Table 3 illustrates that a majority of project managers (63%) believe that it is possible to maintain positive team motivation despite the overall organizational environment, even if they found team motivation to be difficult on their last project. It is interesting to note that 67% of project managers thought it

		It was easy to motivate the team			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
Project managers can motivate their team despite the overall organizational culture	Disagree	7 6%	5 4%	11 10%	23 20%
	Neutral	2 2%	7 6%	12 10%	21 18%
	Agree	15 13%	11 10%	44 38%	70 61%
Total N = 114		24 21%	23 20%	67 59%	114 100%

Table 3: Motivation difficulty in last project and opinion about the project manager's ability to motivate the team.

possible to motivate a team despite intervening organizational factors. At the same time, 59% indicated that it was easy to motivate their last project team. When paired, 38% ($N = 44$) thought that it was easy to motivate the team despite obstacles that might prevent teams from moving forward.

A content analysis was performed to gain further insight into how exactly a project manager can create such a team-based environment. The dominant category that emerged from this analysis emphasized *team goals*. For example, the cluster contained the keywords *focus*, *goals*, and *members*. *Scope change* was a recurrent theme that appeared in the explanations as having a demoralizing effect on team motivation. The following two statements express how strongly respondents felt about these factors and the potential that project managers have to motivate a team despite the overall organizational culture:

Even in a negative organization, a project manager can “sell” the goal of the project to the team. Then he must ensure that the goal is the focus of the team, not the negativity of the organizational culture. Great teams can provide great results despite the culture of the organization.

The project manager can have his own culture within the project environment. That can make up for the negative culture organizationwide. He needs to stay by and support his team members when required. I believe he and his team can even change/impact the organizational culture to a certain extent.

Discussion

The Project Manager's Role in Team Motivation

Team motivation plays an instrumental role in any project and the project manager's knowledge of motivation dynamics and techniques to influence team motivation can lead a project on a successful path. The results of this study show that effective team motivation hinges on many factors ranging from

team-specific elements to organizational influences. One of the salient findings of this study is that current project management professionals believe that they can create their own subculture within an organization and that they can motivate a team despite the overall climate in a company (R3). This finding was reemphasized by the fact that not only successful project managers believe that they can create such a subculture, but also even managers who were struggling with team motivation on their last project (63%) believed that it is possible to create a positive project environment in a negative organization. Project managers, therefore, play a key role in the creation of a positive, highly motivated project environment.

Factors That Most Commonly Impact Team Motivation

Although projects are, by nature, unique endeavors with a limited time span, they all follow similar structures in the achievement of their goals. Being aware of recurring motivational influences in project settings can help a project manager prevent falling team motivation, without having to consult a bag of motivation tricks. As Sirota et al. (2005) pointed out, most project members enter a new project fully motivated due to the novelty and excitement that comes along with a new endeavor. The results of this study (R1) showed that the factors that most commonly provoke a decrease of team motivation are:

- missing top management support,
- personal conflicts between team members, and
- increase of project scope.

The qualitative content analysis also showed that these factors are closely related and are directly tied to the project manager's ability to communicate effectively. Missing top management support can be attributed to the project manager's ability to sell the project to upper management. Without support from upper management,

personal conflicts may inevitably arise due to members' responsibilities within the company. When project members feel more loyal to their regular activities within the organization than to the project, conflicts may arise.

Changes in scope, time, cost, and quality can also directly impact the emotional state of a project team. The results showed that among these four project constraints, changes in scope have the strongest negative impact on team motivation. Focusing on clear scope definitions at the beginning of the project and managing clients' expectations throughout the development of the project will therefore help prevent a decline of motivation within the project team.

Creating Intrinsic Motivation

The best situation a project manager can wish for is a project team that wants to achieve the project's goal because the team members feel personally connected to the outcome of the project. They will do anything needed to make the project work because they receive personal satisfaction from the results of the project. Research Question 2 (R2) explored how the creation of such buy-in is possible in project settings.

The main theme emerging from the quantitative and qualitative results of this study is early involvement of all stakeholders. Team members must be involved in the project from the early kickoff stage to develop a sense of belonging and owning. An overwhelming majority of the project manager respondents (90%) believed that having team members participate in the creation of the work-breakdown structure is essential to keeping team motivation up. A project manager should strive to instill a sense of project ownership in all stakeholders, and early involvement appears to be the best way to accomplish that.

The second most salient theme emerging from the content analysis of R2 was “understanding of team members,” which is essential in the creation

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of a good match of skills to tasks. A project manager has to be careful in assigning tasks to members. Expectations have to be clearly communicated, and project members should be chosen wisely so that project tasks fit the desires of individual team members. Lewis (2003) pointed in the right direction for general managers when he said that it is important for a manager to find out what motivates people in their private lives. Understanding what the individual desires of team members are will give any project manager a leg up in motivating a project team from an intrinsic point of view.

Timing Is Essential

A project manager guides the team through various stages throughout a project life cycle, and the results of this study show that attention to motivation techniques appears to be mostly called for at the beginning of a project. The more a project progresses, the more project managers believe that team motivation is a shared responsibility of the team member and the project manager. The importance of early involvement of stakeholders was highlighted in the analysis of project stages and their relation to team motivation. The majority of respondents agreed that team motivation is high at the beginning of a project (88%) and that it is the responsibility of the project manager to introduce a high level of team motivation during the start of the project (79%). To create a sense of ownership and to attempt to instill intrinsic motivation in the team, a project manager should focus most of his or her motivating efforts on the beginning of the project.

Key Findings and Research

Limitations

The goal of this study was to explore the project manager's perspective on team motivation by exploring successful motivation techniques and determining important factors that decrease team motivation. Taken together, the findings of this study emphasize that

team motivation can be heavily influenced by the project manager, especially during early stages in the project. It appears that project managers have the ability to create a subculture within an overarching organization in which team dynamics can lead to higher levels of motivation than in the encompassing organization.

To achieve a project environment where the majority of the members involved are motivated about the project, project managers have to be sensitive during the early stages of a project. Clear communication at the beginning of projects appears to be the key in the development of high motivation throughout the whole project. At the beginning of a project, the project manager should strive for top management support, establish clear scope requirements with the client and/or sponsor, and involve team members as early as possible to ensure project buy-in from the most important stakeholders in a project.

The results of this study merely highlight trends in current opinions and should not be interpreted in other ways. By asking current professionals in the field about their opinion, the foregoing trends could be identified. However, the current research should not be interpreted as a representative sample of the overall population of project managers worldwide. The sample chosen for the questionnaire was a sample of convenience due to the busy schedule of project management professionals. The trends expressed in the current research should be followed up with case studies or ethnographic analyses to create a more thorough picture of the project manager's perspective.

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