
5 – Power, Influence, Leadership and Responsibilities

Project Manager's Responsibilities

A project manager has three clearly defined management responsibilities:

1. **Resource manager.** Manage and direct project resources to achieve the project objective.
2. **Planning and control manager.** Develop the project plan and ensure that the work is completed on time, within budget, and with acceptable quality.
3. **Coordinator.** Interface with upper management regarding project review, approval, and address project issues. The manager must also relate successfully to line managers and staff.

Often, attention is focused on resource management. In reality, though, a manager may spend much more time performing the other two roles.

Look at a project manager role now from a perspective of doing things. Here is another list:

- **Directing.** Direct the project resources.
- **Motivating.** Motivate the project team in the presence of normal pressures of work as well as political realities and pressures.
- **Planning.** Anticipate and plan ahead. Anything unforeseen can reflect poorly on the project manager, even if it is not the manager's fault.
- **Supervising.** Supervising the work.
- **Administering.** Today's project manager often has to perform many administrative tasks with support.
- **Interfacing and coordinating.** This is the set of tasks that involves meetings and working with line management, external contractors, subcontractors, and management.
- **Doing.** Do some of the tasks themselves and do not just manage the project.
- **Training.** Train members of the project team in project management methods and tools in which they are involved.
- **Counseling.** Act as counsel to management on specific technical or business issues as well as to staff on project and even personal issues.
- **Delegating.** Delegate and then supervise work on the project.
- **Resolving conflicts over resources and schedules.**

referee

Threats to Project Managers

What is waiting in the wings? There are people who may be jealous of the resources and power of the project. They see that their own staff or projects are drained away or put on hold because of your project. They may pay lip service to supporting your project, but underneath they are seething and resentful. Some managers may have candidates for managing the project if they can just get rid of you. They keep looking for ways to involve their candidate in the project. Then with knowledge of the project, they can watch for a false step or problem, and, then like a leopard, they can pounce.

Another threat is that some people may feel threatened by the project itself. If the project succeeds, their department, role, and even their jobs may be in jeopardy. Today, and in the future, this will be true because many projects will act to transform organizations to gain efficiency and effectiveness through reengineering.

This sounds very negative and depressing, but it should not be taken that way because it is a fact of life. What should you do as a project manager? Do you attempt to deal with these factors? You have to assume that they are always present. You should always assume that people will act out of their own and their organization's self-interest.

Bases of Power for a Project Manager

A project manager is the manager of the project. As such, the person has power. There are several different aspects to the power of the project manager that can be invoked in positive or negative ways.

- **Formal authority.** This is the case when the project manager uses his or her formal power to make decisions and decide issues. This may have to be used occasionally, but it can easily be abused. You can successfully appeal to authority very few times.
- **Reward and penalty power.** This is the power to reward or punish team members. In project management, the project manager can bestow few tangible rewards because the manager is not the normal supervisor of the team members. The same applies for penalties. This type of power must also be used sparingly.
- **Power as a technical authority.** The project manager is an expert and so the team members respect the manager because of the expert knowledge. This is rare in many projects. However, with experience, a project manager

can become known as an expert in managing projects.

- **Power through respect.** Through the experience and behavior of the project manager, the project manager instills a sense of respect among the project team. This is probably the best type of power. It is the most honest and direct, and will tend to be long lasting.

Types of Project Managers

- ***The administrator.*** This is the project manager who is engrossed in administrative trivia. This person typically produces very good reports and presentations, but, unfortunately, the work may not get done.
- ***The doer.*** This is the person who takes over tasks and does the work. This person does not delegate well. The manager typically micro-manages the staff on their tasks. Not a healthy situation.
- ***The upward-oriented manger.*** This manager focuses attention on management and getting visibility for themselves with upper management. They may not care that much for the project and may even see it as a stepping stone to something better. They tend to delegate the project. The team tends to see through this and resents the manager.
- ***The task master.*** This project manager will push project team members as long and as hard as possible to get the work done. While this might be noteworthy, the person typically does this when there is no pressure.
- ***The leader.*** The person supports the project team members to get the work done and focuses on issues and not administrative trivia.

Attributes of a Good Project Manager

We have already seen that the good project manager should develop respect among team members and management as a source of power.

Communicator

A project manager needs to communicate well verbally and in writing within and outside of the project. Communication problems have been identified as a major source of project failure.

Generalist

The project manager has been able to see the big picture and then relate it to the

current project situation. The manager must then convey the meaning of this to management and the team. What is the big picture? It includes the relationship of the project to the company. It is the potential impact of the end product of the project to the firm.

Problem and Conflict Solver

Of all of the attributes of project managers, this is the one that has remained important for centuries. A project manager must be able to identify and understand problems, place them in perspective, and then develop and implement solutions. Being able to identify, analyze, and resolve issues are critical success factors for project leaders.

People Management

The project manager has to be able to effectively manage people. A manager can be weaker here if the manager has other compelling strengths. But there is not much room for weakness.

Experience

It is not enough to have had experience in several projects. You have to be able to take this experience, integrate it, and then apply it to the current project. Otherwise, there is no learning or wisdom gained.

Ambition

It is appropriate that a project manager have ambition. Otherwise, why be a project manager? The positive side of ambition will lead you to work hard and positively. It will also help you in dealing with people and getting the project completed. In excess, ambition can do all of the things that have been written about in terms of corruption, deceit, and other similar traits. But it is not wrong to be ambitious, but ambition must be tempered.

Energy

A project manager has to have a lot of energy. Not just to deal with problems, but to be able to take measured risks. Long hours are a part of the job. In the past, people thought that this meant that project managers had to be younger people. Experience and knowledge are valuable.

Knowledge

A project manager needs to be able to acquire information about all aspects of the project quickly. Thus, it is not just knowledge, but it is also the velocity by which it is acquired and the ability to apply the knowledge in the project.

Perspective

A project manager has to be able to step back from the project and take an overall view. Otherwise, symptoms of problems may be overlooked.

Sense of Humor

Events, setbacks, and successes need to be taken seriously, but you must also have a sense of humor.

Initiative and Risk Taking

A project manager should be able to show initiative and be willing to take risks. What do we mean here when we have been stressing minimization of risks? Taking risks may mean giving tasks to junior staff who have not done that exact type of work before, or having faith in some things that are not under your control.

Being Organized

Because project managers are likely to be playing a dual role – project manager and project administrator – they have to be organized. This includes managing time and being able to allocated time and energy to issues that are important. At times it means taking an overall view. At other times, it means being very focused and getting a specific set of tasks done or following an issue to its conclusion.

Able to Take Direction and Suggestions

A good project manager has to be able to admit that there is a problem and accept responsibility. They have to be able to accept suggestions, hints, and criticism and turn it into positive action. Ignoring problems can be their undoing and a source of failure. People will not offer criticism if they know that it will not go anywhere.

Familiarity with the Organization

This is not just memorizing an organization chart. It means knowing how the organization works. Where are the decisions really made? Who really has power? Which managers rely on lower level managers and staff? Who can make decisions? It takes time to learn this, but you have to work at it. How do you learn the organization? The basic method that works is observation. When you are in a meeting, observe how people interact. Observe who makes decisions and who implements. Also, look for the people who have the knowledge of the organization and who seem to have little or no problems getting decisions made and obtaining resources.

Knowledge of Technology

If the project is based on specific technologies, the project manager has to gain some basic knowledge of the technology. Otherwise, the manager will lack credibility with the team. The manager may get the reputation of being easily “snowed” or sold on some idea by appealing to the technology. Now we do not mean that the project manager has to be a techie or expert, but you need to have some basic knowledge.

Maturity

Project managers have to learn to take things in stride. If they lose on an issue, they cannot accept it as fatal. The issue can probably be resurrected later at a more appropriate time. Maturity also means having a sense of timing of when to make certain moves.

Toughness

At times in a project, project managers are faced by personal and management challenges. It is often easiest to take the path of least resistance and either defer decisions or cave into one position. Being tough means that you are willing to take a contrary position.

Integrating the Skills

Obviously, these skills are interdependent. Experience and knowledge facilitate problem solving. Managing people and communicating go hand in hand. These have been identified these separately even though they are closely linked so that you can work on improving your skills in areas where you see the need and benefit from enhancement.

Motivating the Project Team

The challenge of motivating the project team – project managers have to provide motivation and leadership. There are several aspects to motivating people:

- Appealing to the project and its eventual positive impact on the organization. This can be used with the team as a whole. It cannot be overused; otherwise, it will sound trite.
- Appealing to the team member's self-interest. Here you focus on what the individual team member will gain from the project.
 1. There is the experience of the project. This can be useful if there are other similar projects that will be coming up.
 2. You can show that the person is gaining technical skills and competence that will help them wherever they go.
 3. By working on the project, they show that they can be part of a team.

Today, more and more work requires coordination and cooperation. You must provide motivation and encouragement to individuals in the team more than the team as a whole. Doing this helps the project leader keep up-to-date on what is going on in the project.

Setting up Electronic Communications

The project leader should not only define how electronic mail, the Web, groupware, and network will be used, but also facilitate getting these established with procedures at the start of the project. Waiting until the middle of the project will be too late since people have already developed different communication habits.

Working with Constraints

A project manager has to work with many different constraints. First, and, perhaps, most important are political constraints. The project manager has a very limited scope of power. This is reflected in resources because the manager has control over resources for a limited time. It is also reflected in the budget because the project manager has no standard budget as does a line department. The manager has direction over limited funds that are allocated to specific purposes and that are available for only a limited time.

Another set of constraints is the societal environment at the time that the project is undertaken. This includes the attitude toward work and ethics.

Today we have several constraints, including time and a demand to show early results. Patience is somewhat of a luxury. Even large projects that are approved require periodic approval and endorsement. This is based on showing results. Contrast this with the 1940s-1960s. Then there were many projects (atomic bomb, other weapons systems, alternative energy, etc.) where much time and resources were allocated over a longer horizon. Today, the time horizon is compressed.

Taking Over a Project

In many cases you do not have the luxury of starting a project from the beginning. You are assigned to take on an ongoing project that has had its normal share of successes and problems. What do you do first? You will be given the assignment by a manager. Ask the manager (and client or prime contractor and major subcontractors, as applicable) what they perceive to be the state of the project and what the issues in the project are. Ask them also what they expect in terms of short-term results.

Meet with the previous manager (if possible) and take over the files and plan. Have them explain the plan but focus on the issues and outstanding problems as well as the current state of the project. You will be expected to land running in the project. Keep the first meeting short. Read and review the material. They have a second meeting to go over details. You should probably assume that you will have only two meetings. After all, the old project manager wants to spend time on their new work.

Now you have basic project information. It is time to meet the project team. Go to each team member individually and introduce yourself. Ask the team member to explain what they are working on and what they see as the issues in the project. Ask them what they need or where they require help. This will establish rapport with each person on the team. Do this for people who have even small roles on the project. Consider, if you have time, contacting people that previously worked on the project and get their views.

Next, visit the line managers (and the client project manager's lieutenants involved in the project, or contractor project manager's lieutenants, as applicable) who have supplied people to work on the project. Again, seek out their concerns and issues. Tell them what you intend to do next and that you will get back to them after you have taken over the project so that you can give feedback.

It is now time to have a team meeting. Prior to the meeting you should identify the top ten or so things that you need to address as a manager. Get concurrence from the team on these issues. Do not disrupt any ongoing work. You must instill a feeling of calm.

After the meeting, start to design any changes to the project plan that are needed. Do not implement any changes until they have been thought through. It is more important to determine the true status of the project and start addressing project issues. This shows the team that you are action oriented.

Implement changes one at a time. Don't stretch it out. Otherwise, the team will feel that the project is not stable. Make sure that you present the reasons for the changes with the changes themselves. Make every attempt to get buy-in where possible.

Turning Around a Failing Project

Suppose that you have just been appointed as the project manager and that the project is in trouble. You will be following the steps above, but there are some specific things you need to do.

1. Gain consensus among the members of the project team about the problems of the project. Even if the problems are obvious, you should get agreement. Then you should start to work with individual team members on the issues in the project.
2. After you have identified and developed an approach for each issue, you should devise an overall strategy. Take nothing for granted. You usually have only one major chance to turn the project around. If you make the wrong steps now, you could be doomed. Outlining alternatives is very important here. Try to see how much you can improve through project changes without any additional money. Going back to ask for more money is not going to be popular. The project could be killed. You may have to ask for more time. The details will be covered in the change section of the course.

Measuring Yourself as a Project Manager

How are you doing? Some project managers measure themselves by the state of the project. This is just a start. Here are some key questions:

- How rapidly are issues being addressed and resolved?
- What is the general mood and atmosphere in the project?

- How cooperative and helpful are line managers toward you and the project?
- To what level of detail do you know what is going on in the project?
- How often do you get around to visiting each member of the project team?
- Are you an absentee leader?

Ways to Fail as a Project Manager

- Take a hands-off approach to project administration.
- Do not get involved in individual tasks.
- Let issues drift and remain unresolved.
- Be unwilling to listen to suggestions for change.
- Be over-focused on specific project management tools.
- Become obsessed with percentage complete for tasks.
- Measure milestones by presence and not quality.
- Devote too much attention to relations with management and not enough to the project team.
- Be over-concerned with project administration and neglect project management.
- Attempt to micromanage the project and not delegate.
- Be formal in relations with project team.
- Do not stay in communications with line managers.
- Make too many changes to the schedule.
- Be willing to rapidly adopt new tools without assessing the consequences.
- Be status-oriented and issue-oriented at project meetings.
- Develop an overly general project plan without detailed tasks.
- Be tool-focused as opposed to method-oriented with the tools supporting the methods.
- Fail to regularly communicate in person with all key members of the project team.
- Leave issues unsolved and allow them to fester and grow.
- Address issues without analysis.

Ways to Succeed as a Project Manager

- Know what is going on in the project in detail.
- Understand and be sympathetic to project team members.
- Be able to make decisions.
- Understand issues and their importance and meaning to the project.
- Communicate effectively with management.
- Develop alternative actions.
- Translate actions into specific changes in the project.
- Know how to use project management tools and methods effectively.

- Be able to learn from past projects (study lessons learned and apply them!)
- Be able to criticize yourself and your performance.
- Be able to take criticism.
- Understand trade-offs involving the schedule and budget.
- Listen to project team members.
- Understand and act on suggestions for improvement.
- Be open to new methods.
- Understand the trade-offs between the project needs and the needs of the organization.
- Communicate effectively with line managers.
- Manage your time well.
- Set up and manage the project file.
- Be able to generate and use reports from project management software system.
- Have patience.
- Be able to take a longer term perspective.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Relate current events to project management and the project.
- Be able to run a meeting.

The Negatives and What to Watch For

How to Spot a Witch-hunt

You must be able to spot a witch-hunt so that you do not get caught up in the hunt. How does it start? A manager may show up at the project meeting and announce that an audit or review of the project is to be conducted by an outsider. This can be a consulting or accounting firm. Listen to the words carefully as the charter and mission of the audit are described. Are they specific? If they are, then there is hope that this is a sincere review. But if it's a general review, watch out! The game is afoot!

What Do You Do if it is a Witch-hunt?

Let us assume that you are on the project team and that you suspect that the review is a witch-hunt. What do you do? After the initial meeting ask the manager what the focus of the review is and what materials you should prepare. If you are met with evasive answers, this reinforces your feelings that there is a hunt. After the meeting wait for the people to come to you. Organize your file and materials and be ready. Review the project in your mind in terms of major events

and problems. If you are having trouble finding problems, then concentrate on the politics of the project. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Did the project antagonize managers because it was completed?
- Who stands to lose politically if the project is viewed as a success or failure?
- Did the project manager make some people angry?
- Did the project take resources from competing projects? If so, how were they impacted?

When the people who are conducting the review visit you, be cooperative. Show them what you have and explain your role carefully and precisely. Do not act shy or reticent. It will convey that you are trying to hide something. If they want to take documents from you, indicate that you still are using them, but that you will make copies.

What kind of questions are you being asked? Are you being asked how certain people behaved during the project? Beware if they are trying to take you into "their confidence." This is very similar to police interrogation with multiple suspects. You are a suspect. They want you to tell them about the project. Be careful.

As the hunt continues, other project team members will be getting nervous. They may ask you what is going on and what you have heard. Play dumb and do not spend a lot of time with them unless the project requires it.

Let's look at the review from the standpoint of the reviewer. The reviewer was brought in to find something. If nothing is found, the reviewer may be in trouble. The manager is at fault for bringing in the reviewer. After all, the reviewer may have already been told what is to be found. The only thing that remains is to find evidence.

The Positives and What to Watch For

What is Project Success?

Project success is a vague term. A project could be a physical failure, but a political success (e.g., Aswan Dam). This indicates that whether a project was a success depends on the perspective from which the project is viewed. However, we can give some criteria for success.

Project on Schedule and Within Budget

Was the project completed within schedule and budget? Answering this question is not as simple as it seems because the budget and schedule may have been changed many times. The answer requires a look back across the project.

End Product in Use

Is the product of the project being used? This question goes to the heart of the project. We have discussed issues of quality, maintainability and completeness. Here we ask if the results of the project are being used in everyday business processes. If they are, then there is some measure of success.

Project Manager and Team Performance

How well did the project manager and project team perform? This is not a simple rating as in the Olympic Games where judges hold up signs with scores. Did the project team deal with issues early or as soon as they surfaced? Or, did they fester and get worse? Was management kept informed about the project? What signs were there of misunderstandings?

In general, most projects are viewed as a mixture of failure and success. Some things worked; some did not. The end product is often not quite right. It works but unforeseen behavior and impacts occurred. A prime example of this is a new freeway or rapid transit system. At the start of the operation the transportation system is a success. Transit time is reduced. But now people start to move to be close to the system to shorten their commuting time. Transit times increase due to clogged surface streets. This happened with the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit System) in San Francisco, California. The system works. But maintenance is a constant battle. More cars cannot be ordered because the company that made the cars went out of that business.

Thus, a key ingredient of success or failure is not the short-term success or failure, but what happens in the longer term. This relates to operability and maintenance. There are two automobiles that sold quite well. Sounds like success, eh? They were not. In one case, to change the front shock absorbers, the entire front end of the car has to be taken apart. Very expensive. In the other case, to do a tune up, the engine has to be lifted from the engine compartment. Why? The engine has to be removed to reach the rear two spark plugs because there is not enough space to work in under the hood. Sales of both later declined. We learn from this discussion that there can be both success and failure. Furthermore, the situation can evolve over time.