

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO
ACCELERATE YOUR CAREER



FAST TRACK TO SUCCESS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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From a personal perspective we have taken contingency planning out of projects and into day-to-day business. Often when travelling around the world to events, conferences and training sessions we are aware that airlines and airports seem to make an increasingly frequent habit of losing luggage. We therefore now take contingency planning to such an extent that we almost expect luggage to be delayed or lost en route. Therefore, when sending materials, handouts, books and so on, we always keep one set of everything with us and all the paperwork on data pens that hang around our necks. If either of us gets to the destination and, surprise surprise, the materials are not there, at least if we can get to a photocopier or a PC and printer we can run off some basic copies to get everything started.

If this, admittedly rather pessimistic, mindset was employed by all project managers, would there be a lot less surprises in projects?

6 THE TEAM *Team selection*

Remember, it is people that make projects successful, not software or systems. So any project manager will want to select the best people for the job and use them effectively. However, many managers feel that they have little leeway when it comes to selecting members of their core project team – they have whom they have and there is very little choice. In addition, many project managers find that they don't have enough people to fill distinctive specialist project roles and that a number of people will have to double up in their roles.

Despite these limitations, it is worth having a look at the techniques that could support you as a project manager in the area of team selection. Build your team carefully, since it will make or break the project. When you have found the person with the right skills, ask yourself:

- Do I know this person well enough to trust them?
- Will I be able to work comfortably with them?
- Will they get along with the other team members?
- Do they have the skills needed or will they require some training?

Technical skills versus people skills

Think about a very successful project that you have been part of in the past (come on, there must be one!). Then think about the project manager of that successful project and list the skills and abilities of that manager and how they directly contributed to the success of the project. Once you have written them down, divide the skills and abilities into two types – those of a technical nature (e.g. planning skills, content knowledge of the project, risk management skills) and those of an interpersonal nature (e.g. good motivator, good communication skills, empathy, excellent delegation skills). You should find that the effective project manager has a combination of both types of skill – technical and interpersonal.

It is a well-known fact that people tend to recruit in their own image. We recruit those whom we are comfortable with in terms of their attitude and outlook as well as their experience. But therein lies a problem for project managers when creating a core project team. People may have the necessary technical skills for the job but if everyone is technical by nature or training there is a risk that the team may not have much in the way of people skills, or vice versa.

Assess your core team's abilities – are they all technical geniuses but not that comfortable standing up and talking to people and listening to their ideas, or are they the opposite – great empathisers but with little or no content knowledge of the project on hand and no planning skills whatsoever? If this is the case then you need to move towards a balance. Start recruiting to your team people whose skills and, more importantly, abilities complement yours, rather than duplicate them.

Key team roles

In any team you need to look for people to carry out a team role as well as their functional role. To operate efficiently you, as the team leader and project manager, will want someone to perform the following roles:

- **Coordinator/administrator.** Someone who pulls together the work of the team as a whole and keeps all the paperwork/IT databases up to date.
- **Critic.** The guardian and analyst of the team's effectiveness, who challenges people when standards and quality drop.

- **Ideas person.** Someone who innovates and looks for new ways of doing things and for potential shortcuts.
- **Implementer.** A person who ensures that the team's actions and decisions are put into place and are seen through.
- **External contact.** Someone who oversees external contacts and relations with third parties.
- **Inspector.** The quality guru who looks to ensure that a project has high quality throughout and that the team works to high standards. The inspector should always seek to establish new standards and ways of working which raise standards. In contrast to the critic, the inspector should always cite alternatives and options.
- **Expert.** The technical specialist required for certain parts of the project or for detailed analysis. There may be more than one.

As you appoint people to the team, check off each of these roles to make sure that someone in the team leans towards that sort of contribution. You may discuss this team role with them or not, depending on circumstances (and politics).

Build a team that takes advantage of each individual's skills and avoids the impact of their weaknesses. Remember, especially if you are involved with projects for third parties or external clients, you should ask potential team members if they identify with the aims and objectives of the project. They do not have to agree with them totally but they must at least feel comfortable with why the organisation needs to achieve them.

We are increasingly aware that seniority and job description do not always determine competence, and that when forming a team attitude and dependability count for a lot. In a London-based banking corporation a series of tasks within a major project required the gathering of information from a number of directors and senior managers. They had a reputation for being rather tardy in meeting deadlines that they did not see as being personal priorities. With this in mind, we included in the project team a couple of personal assistants, one of whom especially had a reputation of being something of a Rottweiler when it came to getting jobs done. She took it as an insult on her professional integrity if

tasks she asked for were late – irrespective of who the person involved was. Many of the directors and managers involved knew of her and were anxious not to cross her. In terms of getting things done, she was excellent. She was not the most senior member of the team by any means, and she did not have the technical skills for the specific tasks. Yet she had tenacity, and people were concerned about not getting her work done on time. She was the best team member for that part of the project.

7 CRITICAL DECISIONS

Making decisions as a team

Whether in the planning or implementation phase of your project, quality decision making is crucial. New project managers may wish to involve members of the team in making important decisions but this can be fraught with difficulties. Using a decision-making process gets over such problems. Using a formal process may seem over the top at first, and look as though it takes up too much time, but speed will improve with experience. Most importantly, a quality consultative process will help you come to the right decision. The spin-off benefit is that people implement decisions more willingly if they feel that they have been part of the decision-making process.

So, having a logical process is the key to good, team decisions. The only potential drawback, apart from the time issue, is that there is sometimes a risk of ‘group-think’, where everyone involved comes up with a similar answer or recommendation just when you wanted people to think differently and more widely.

The decision-making process

Here is a simple process for team decision making.

- 1 The team must first agree on the criteria against which to measure a decision or course of action.** Ask team members to brainstorm what an ideal solution would look like, using questions such as, ‘What benefits should we look for in a solution?’

or 'What should any solution do for us?' This list of criteria can then give you and the team a way of filtering options and comparing the alternatives.

- 2 The next stage is to identify which criteria are the most important.** You are looking for the vital criteria against which any alternative option will be judged – the minimum standard.
- 3 Now measure all the options available against the ideal agreed for each criterion.** This seems easy but actually requires creativity to evaluate possible decisions effectively.
- 4 Continue this measurement and evaluations process until one option stands out.** Encourage debate and discussion at this stage, as you need input from all involved.
- 5 Look at this 'final' option – what are the risks around this alternative and how do they weigh against the potential benefits?** If the risks are acceptable and the option meets your decision-making objectives, then go for it. It is your best-balanced decision.

As an example, in the planning phase of a project teams often have to decide which suppliers or contractors to use. Setting clear criteria for how to make those choices will give the team a good start. List these criteria out clearly – for example, 'Will have the necessary number of people on site within a week' or 'Can complete tasks within budget of £20,000'. Understanding which criteria are the most important – cost, speed, quality or a combination of other factors – is critical to helping a team come to a swift decision. Then you can measure the performance of possible suppliers against these criteria to narrow down the available options. Keep discussing the options, refining as you go the criteria and the standards you require against them. This brings you to the best option, and you need quickly to examine the risks that this decision might involve. At the end of the process not only should you have the best decision but also you will have the team's agreement to the decision and their commitment to their role in implementing it.

In many projects, once the decision and choice has been made, the reasons behind it are often lost. In contrast, in a forward-looking learning organisation the criteria for decision making are often kept as a guide for future teams.

You might want an objective critic, who is not part of the core project team, at this stage to review your decision before you implement it – acting as a final ‘double-check’. This is important, for as project manager the final responsibility rests with you. Here’s a double-checking shortcut that validates the choice using the SAFE acronym:

- **Suitable.** Is the decision really the most suitable one, given the current state of the project?
- **Acceptable.** Is the decision acceptable to all the key stakeholders who have an interest in the project – not just those involved in making the decision?
- **Feasible.** Will the implementation of the decision be practical and feasible, given time, resources and skills available?
- **Enduring.** Will the solution or course of action decided upon endure to the end of the project and into the long term, or is it just a short-term solution?



QUICK TIP OBJECTIVES

Make sure that your objectives are measurable. Use SMART objectives whenever possible (see page 41).

8 RESOURCES AND BUDGET

Creating a project budget

When it comes to finances and budgeting, many people – particularly technical project managers – start to worry. It is not their natural ground to cost up a project; but until you create a full project budget there is no way of calculating whether the project will generate a positive return on investment (ROI). It is unlikely that a project will be given authorisation to go ahead without an accurate and detailed idea of costs, yet people seem to think that they can fudge financial planning.