

Project Management and Your Career

Share your vision of success with your employees. It's something they can win if they put out the effort. They'll get excited about success when they know you're excited.

—NICHOLAS V. IUPPA, AUTHOR OF *MANAGEMENT BY GUILT*—

''I think our manager is burned out,'' one project team member told another.

The second one agreed: ''I've noticed that he's been a bit short-tempered lately.''

''That's not what I mean,'' the first one said. ''Yesterday, he sent me down to the lunchroom to get him a cup of coffee.''

''What's wrong with that?''

''Instead of just giving me a list, he drew out his instructions on a network diagram.''

Who gets promoted in your company? Is it the person who is merely capable, doesn't make waves, and survives without upsetting the delicate balance of the corporate culture? Or is it the person who excels?

Because survivors are not risk takers, they are eventually overlooked. They may do well initially, but in the long term, it is the exceptional manager who receives promotions and gains a profitable and fulfilling career. Whether your performance as a department manager is exceptional or only average, if you also manage projects you have the chance to exceed beyond the ''average'' category.

In many departments, budgets, staff, recurring tasks, and other factors limit your freedom to express and demonstrate your skills to their greatest potential. You may be working full time just to maintain the minimum requirements of the job. You may face few opportunities to even have your abilities put to the test. But when a project comes along, that could be your chance to not only develop your leadership skills, but show management what you can do in a high-profile project. Managing a complex job and skillfully delivering the result on time will get management's attention.

An Organizational Science

A large part of your success as a project manager depends on your abilities to organize and define. In comparison, the actual work is not difficult. In fact, the better you organize and define all aspects of your project, the easier it is to execute tasks.

Organizing the project requires several leadership actions on your part, including:

- ***Defining the purpose and goals of the project.*** Getting to the point of understanding between yourself and the person giving you the assignment can take a great deal of effort on your part. Don't expect the definition to be handed to you. Many people, including executives, have difficulty explaining precisely what they want. It is all too easy to take on an assignment without having a clear idea of what it is supposed to achieve. Your first organizational challenge is to ask the right questions at the time of assignment.

- ***Organizing a schedule.*** Once a schedule is completed, it should look like a fairly simple document. Each phase is broken down

and defined; deadlines are specific; and tasks are assigned to team members. But a complex and lengthy project demands a far greater level of organizational skill in the beginning. You need to coordinate time demands for each phase while anticipating potential problems. You must also be aware of time restrictions for each of your team members. Thus, you need to look far ahead, through to the end of the project, in order to organize the schedule realistically.

■ ***Developing a team approach.*** Your ability to lead the project team effectively depends on how well your team works together. This does not take place without strong, motivated, and focused leadership. Simply assigning people to the team doesn't make it a working team. The better you organize every aspect of the project and define what you need and expect, the easier it will be to develop the team. A team does not begin functioning properly right away; development of the team is an ongoing process that lasts as long as the project.

■ ***Resolving conflicts.*** Invariably, the pressures associated with working against deadlines and cooperating with a variety of internal and external resources will create conflict at some point, perhaps several times. Many of these conflicts relate to scheduling between recurring department duties and the demands of the project; others may arise from disagreements or competition between team members. As project manager, you need to be ready to act as mediator and diplomat to avoid the kinds of difficulties that are unavoidable whenever people work together.

■ ***Keeping the lines of communication open.*** As project manager, you must continually define, redefine, and modify. You also need to train team members, cooperate with department managers, enlist help from outside resources, and reassure top management. Your project team does not operate in isolation, so your task is to function as organizer and operator of a network with conflicting interests and priorities.

■ ***Meeting budgets and deadlines.*** As the organized project manager, you need to review status daily. That means tracking the budget and schedule and looking for any sign of variances or delays, and

then taking action to correct problems. You monitor each phase as it proceeds, with an eye to the immediate deadline as well as the final deadline. The tools you need for this purpose include the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), Critical Path Method (CPM), Gantt chart, and network diagram.

■ ***Training and supervising team members.*** While the project is under way, you must supervise team members directly. Some people may not know how to execute a task, for example. It is often assumed that team members know how to do their tasks without supervision, and that is a mistake. Don't overlook the most obvious function of all—helping team members understand their immediate assignments.

Attributes of Project Leadership

Achieving the many organizational objectives of project management places demands on you and your leadership skills. In some departments, ''participative'' management is not always possible or practical. Departments are not best run in a democratic manner. In projects, however, it is more likely that team members can be given the freedom to express ideas and contribute to the project in creative ways, even to take on part of the leadership role.

The team relationship is ever-changing and has to be altered with each individual. While you may be familiar with the relational aspects of managing a department, you may need to adjust for the project. Your project management skills are put to best use when:

■ ***You understand and practice the team approach.*** Some people endorse participative management in concept, but don't really understand how it works. To succeed in project management, you need to make the best use of the team. Creating a team by picking members is just the first step; you also need to allow the team the flexibility to excel, which usually means relaxing the kinds of controls you employ in the department.

■ ***You apply a standard that is different from the one used in your department.*** Some very capable department managers struggle

with projects because they do not make an easy transition from running a permanent department. Project management is far different in most of its aspects, so a completely different approach is required to make it work. You need to remain in control, of course, but you also need to encourage a more democratic approach than you can in your department.

- ***You can organize a multiple effort.*** On a complex project, team members operate on several phases and levels at the same time. You need to organize the concurrent effort, supervise everyone, and monitor schedule and budget—all at the same time. You may also need to supervise and train team members as they move through phases. On top of all this, you probably need to continue running your department as well.

- ***You are flexible.*** Even the best-defined plans change for a variety of reasons, most of which are beyond your immediate control. Be prepared for unexpected change—in your schedule, resources, and even in the definition of the project itself.

- ***You communicate well with everyone.*** You may be deeply involved in the hands-on work of the project, supervising team members, and monitoring the schedule and budget. But you remain responsible for keeping open the lines of communication on all levels—between team members and with departments, outside resources, and top management.

Taking Charge

Living up to the standards of project management success may seem to demand a superhuman effort. The requirements of supervision and communication—both of which are needed in order to execute the project as an exception to your normal routine—place considerable pressure on you. However, the solution is not to put in more hours or effort, but to work to define your goals and then execute them. To achieve this in an orderly and realistic manner, measure results not in hours spent, but in organizational skills and their application.

Staying in control in your department calls for a firm hand. You succeed as a project manager when you adopt a more flexible leadership style—without giving up the strength of leadership. Your precise style in leading your project team should be modified based on at least four general variables:

1. ***The makeup of the team.*** With a fairly small team consisting of employees from your department, your leadership style can remain constant. This is the easiest form of team structure to work with, because there are no outside resources with their inherent independence and conflicting priorities to complicate matters. But that is not how things always work out. As soon as the team expands beyond your department, your style needs modification.

2. ***Scope of the project.*** Some projects are meant to function only as committees, put together to investigate, compile data, and report. Other projects are more action-oriented, organized to make significant changes. Projects may be short term or last many months. The style you employ with your team has to be based on the purpose, scope, and duration of each project.

3. ***Cooperation from other departments.*** We would all like to believe that other managers will cheerfully cooperate with our efforts. In practice, this does not always occur. Thus, your management style has to be flexible so that you can cooperate, negotiate, compromise, and adjust to varying levels of response.

4. ***Time demands.*** You may need to complete a project under extreme time constraints. In some companies, this is the norm; everything is critical and work proceeds on a continual emergency basis. The greater the pressure to finalize a project, the less luxury you enjoy to experiment with management styles; the ''style'' has to be to rush the project through.

How you take charge of a project depends largely on your personal experience. As you move through the process of managing projects, you will discover what works and what does not. The circumstances unique to one project do not apply to another.

Eliminating Common Problems

Even when you organize and lead your projects well, you may find yourself running into the same problems time and again. Learning how to resolve these difficulties improves your chances of becoming more effective in your project management role. Ten common problems you are likely to face are outlined in Figure 13-1. Each is discussed in depth here:

1. ***The team doesn't work well together.*** When you struggle to create a team but don't succeed, first examine your own management

Figure 13-1. Ten common problems for project managers.

1. The team doesn't work well together.

2. Other managers resist having their employees recruited to your team.

3. Management skills that work in the department don't seem to work on the project.

4. The goals of the project are not well defined.

5. Top management changes the scope of the project after it has started.

6. Communication with top management while the project is under way is not effective.

7. The schedule is difficult to control.

8. Deadlines are not being met, and projects are completed late.

9. Project budgets don't work, resulting in expense overruns.

10. There is no time for overview or control.

style. Do you offer team members the chance to participate and take control over their area of responsibility? Or do you discourage them from speaking out, offering ideas or alternatives, or suggesting changes? Teams work best when you encourage participation and then follow up on it with your actions.

The problem can also be caused by the very diversity among your core team. The involvement of people from several different departments can be detrimental to the development of real team action. The more people are involved and the more diverse their backgrounds, the greater your difficulty is going to be in getting people to cooperate and think and act as a real team.

2. ***Other managers resist having their employees recruited to your team.*** You face a formidable task in getting cooperation from other department managers—no matter how diplomatically you approach them or how well you define and explain the project. To solve this problem, you must convince other managers that you will respect their priorities—and their territory.

3. ***Management skills that work in the department don't work on the project.*** Be aware of the important differences between departmental management and project management. You need to employ different forms of supervision and leadership with each. In fact, the skills that work most effectively in your department tend to interfere with team participation, so strive to develop an entirely different approach to supervising a project team.

4. ***The goals of the project are not well defined.*** Your first responsibility is to ensure that the goals of the project are clearly and specifically spelled out. You may have to push to get the assignment clarified before you are able to develop and explain its goals. It often is true that even the executive who gives you the assignment doesn't really know what he or she expects from the project. Only when you have clear definition can you approach your task as a science.

5. ***Top management changes the scope of the project after it has started.*** Unfortunately, priorities change. You cannot safely assume that a project assigned today will remain valid by its deadline.

Chronic changes in project assignment are symptoms of weak leadership, and in that case there is little that you can do to work effectively in seeing the project through to its end. However, even in the best of environments, a particular project can become obsolete, requiring modification or even a complete revision. Be flexible so that you can adjust to unexpected changes in the nature of the assignment itself.

6. ***Communication with top management while the project is under way is not effective.*** How do you handle the problem of poor communication with top management? Even when you make the effort to keep the lines open, management does not always keep you in the loop about changing priorities.

You cannot force management to improve communication skills. You can only present status reports, ask for continuing definition, and convey information. If you cannot get an executive to take time for a brief meeting, chances are communication will be poor no matter what steps you take. You may find that management fails to respond to your suggestions or requests, does not confirm project goals, and offers little or no support. Nothing is worse than this situation, because you are operating in a vacuum. When you present your final work on the project, you are likely to be told, ''This is not what I wanted.''

Management wants to support you, of course, to maintain morale and reduce unnecessary expenditure of staff time. You can resolve problems of this nature most of the time by making an extra effort to get consensus from management about the project and what it is supposed to accomplish.

7. ***The schedule is difficult to control.*** Coordinating the efforts of many subgroups and individuals within a limited time frame is always a struggle. Examine the methods you use to monitor your schedule and to convey vital information to team members. A nicely detailed network diagram is an effective tool for ensuring that team members have a good perspective on the project and their roles. Most scheduling problems result from lack of enough detail in the schedule document itself.

8. ***Deadlines are not being met, and projects are completed late.*** Even with the best procedures for schedule control, and even

when team members work well together, you will not always be able to meet phase deadlines or deliver the project by deadline.

Your schedule may be unrealistic, especially if imposed on you from above. It may be necessary to accept delays in order to ensure quality and accuracy, or to increase the size of the project team. If management has given you an unrealistic deadline, you need to bring this fact to its attention and request a modification. Either the schedule needs to be changed or the staff budget increased. Failing either of these actions, your project will either be late or done in a hurry. A realistic completion time for the project is always defined by the scope of the job, and that cannot be known accurately until it has been mapped out. Thus, the very situation in which a deadline is imposed before the project has been planned out makes no sense. The best you can do in this situation is to go back to management with your schedule and try to discuss alternatives, preferably including an extended deadline.

9. ***Project budgets don't work, resulting in expense overruns.*** In your preoccupation with the schedule, it's easy to overlook the importance of the budget. Realistically, the schedule is the key to running a project. However, top management is likely to be more concerned with whether you are exceeding a budget, even an arbitrary one. Budgets have to be monitored with great care because it's the nature of management to judge effectiveness in terms of spending levels.

Unfortunately, many people in business—including executives—do not understand the purpose of budgeting. While it should serve as a standard for measuring actual results, the budget often becomes established as an absolute, and any unfavorable variances imply a failure somewhere along the way, usually with the project manager. While this practice is unfair and unrealistic, it may also be the status quo in your organization. Budget variances arise for one of three reasons: The original budget was unrealistic; expenses are not being controlled well enough; or most significantly, when the budget was developed, it did not anticipate the real expense of the project. If a budget was imposed on your project before its scope was understood,

then you face the all-too-common problem of budgets being misused. You are expected to conform to a budget that has nothing to do with the expense levels you face. Your best solution is to compare realities to the budget and explain unfavorable variances in the context that makes sense: The budget was not adequate for the project.

10. ***There is no time for overview or control.*** You may find yourself committed so heavily to project tasks and supervision (not to mention ongoing departmental duties) that you don't have time to monitor schedules and budgets.

No matter how busy you are, monitoring and controlling are your primary responsibilities as a project manager. Although you have to fill many roles—trainer, supervisor, leader, communicator, and morale officer—your primary job remains pilot. The project network is complex and can't run on its own. You may need to delegate tasks to others to free up your time for this all-important function. Avoid the mistake of getting so involved in the details of the project that you don't have time to step back and make sure you're on course.

Maximizing Your Skills

As you gain experience managing projects, your career possibilities will expand as well. A top management team that is cognizant of its resources will recognize ability and reward it. Projects are an exceptional forum for demonstrating your leadership abilities.

In addition to developing the skills required for effective project management, set career goals based on the abilities you develop as a project manager. Your top-five goals may include, for example:

1. ***Acquiring a reputation as a skilled, effective project manager.*** Be aware of the importance of reputation to your career. Reliability is a crucial attribute. Once you are seen as reliable, you will be seen as a candidate for promotion. Become a skilled project manager by practicing the techniques that make the process work. Become an effective project manager by keeping goals in mind at all times, working to meet deadlines, supporting your team, and working well with all resources, whether internal or external.

2. ***Meeting deadlines.*** Some people accept the fact that deadlines are not taken seriously most of the time. Don't allow yourself to think this way. View deadlines in absolute terms, and strive to meet or beat them without fail. If you never miss a reasonable deadline, management will view you as professional and reliable. If deadlines are not going to be met, communicate that information as soon as you know and propose solutions to management. People at the top will view you as serious and responsible in that case.

3. ***Staying within budget.*** The budget, like the schedule, is often misused or not taken seriously. Few people use budgets as a means for comparing results against a standard. Look at budgets as a means for defining and controlling your project. Remember that success within a company often is measured by how much or how little is spent within departments or in projects. Your budget should be a realistic expression of what the project should cost. The degree to which you are able to come in under budget will be used by top management as a measurement of your effectiveness.

4. ***Producing and delivering the desired result.*** Once you have achieved a clear definition of your project's purpose, you should know exactly what management expects in the way of results. As long as you keep communicating about your progress toward the project's goal, you will succeed. Produce and deliver the desired result, and management will view you as a results-oriented manager. That is, after all, the job of the project manager.

5. ***Resolving conflicts.*** Conflicts—whether involving mere scheduling problems or the more difficult personality clash—might seem a trivial matter in the bigger scheme of things. But your ability to resolve conflicts may end up being the most important attribute of project management. In some volatile situations, conflict defines the project environment. It demands energy, diplomacy, and a sincere effort to address everyone's concerns to defuse conflict.

Career opportunities within your company are going to be filled by individuals whom management believes can fill the need. Job skills are mundane attributes compared to the skills you gain by experiencing project management and completing the project successfully. You can demonstrate your value to the organization by your ability to provide strong leadership, resolve conflicts, manage a multitask schedule, communicate on all levels, work with other managers, inspire a diverse team to work together, and produce the desired result within a deadline.

As a project manager, the project itself is the opportunity to demonstrate your best qualities, to a greater extent than you can do as a department manager. When you accept a project assignment, remember that management will develop its perception of your capabilities (or limitations) based on your performance in that role, the results you generate, and the conflicts you are able to resolve quietly and effectively. You don't need a high profile, just a consistent and successful record based on producing results.

You'll know you are on the right track when management comes to you with their most difficult, complex jobs. That tells you that your hard work has paid off, because management asks for you when it needs a job done professionally.

WORK PROJECT

1. Describe at least three types of leadership action required to organize a project.
2. Explain at least three skills you need to master to succeed as a project manager.
3. List two or more variables that will affect your project leadership style.



Finding the Best Project Management Software

Many software programs can be put to use online or through purchase. Some are free, and others require purchase or online collaboration. Before purchasing any system, review and check it through reviews in one of the many software magazines or online sources.

Following is a list of some of the programs you can find online:

Artemis	http://www.aisc.com/
Basecamp	http://basecamphq.com/
Business Process Manager	http://www.planview.com
Central Desktop	http://www.centraldesktop.com
Clarizen	http://www.clarizen.com
Collanos	http://www.collanos.com
Computer Associates	http://www.ca.com
Copper Project	http://www.copperproject.com
Daptiv	http://www.daptiv.com
Easy Projects	http://www.easyprojects.net
EnterPlicity	http://www.teaminteractions.com

evisioner	http://www.evisioner.com
FastTrack Schedule	http://www.aecsoftware.com/products/fasttrack
GanttProject	http://ganttproject.biz
Gatherspace	http://www.gatherspace.com
Genius Inside	http://www.geniusinside.com/web/website.nsf
InLoox	http://www.inloox.com
Kplato	http://koffice.org/kplato
LiquidPlanner	http://www.liquidplanner.com
MicroPlanner X-Pert	http://www.microplanning.com
Microsoft Project	http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/project
Minuteman	http://www.minuteman-systems.com
OmniPlan	http://www.omnigroup.com/applications/omniplan
OpenAir	http://www.openair.com
OpenMind Business	http://www.matchware.com/en/products/openmind/default.htm
Open Plan Professional	http://www.welcom.com
OpenProj	http://www.projity.com
Planisware	http://www.planisware.com
Planner Suite	http://www.plannersuite.com
Primavera P6	http://www.primavera.com
Project Insight	http://www.projectinsight.net
Project Kickstart	http://www.projectkickstart.com
Project.net	http://www.project.net
ProjectPartner	http://www.projectpartner.com
ProjectPier	http://www.projectpier.org
Projectplace	http://www.projectplace.com
ProWorkFlow	http://www.proworkflow.com
RationalPlan	http://www.rationalplan.com
RiskyProject	http://www.intaver.com
SaaS VPMi	http://www.vcsonline.com
Santexq	http://www.santexq.com
SharpForge	https://sharpforge.org/p/SharpForge.aspx
SmartDraw	http://www.smartdraw.com

TaskJuggler	http://www.taskjuggler.org
Task Manager	http://www.taskmanagementsoft.com
Teamwork	http://www.twproject.com
Trac	http://trac.edgewall.org
Track+	http://www.trackplus.com
Tracker Suite	http://www.acentre.com
ValleySpeak	http://www.valleyspeak.com
ViewPath	http://www.viewpath.com
web-based-software	http://www.project-management-software.org
Wrike	http://www.wrike.com
Zoho Projects	http://projects.zoho.com/jsp/home.jsp

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