

Project Pointers

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Issue 6



**ARE YOUR
PROJECTS
MANAGING
YOU?**

During the last year, we reviewed the fundamentals of project management and practiced using various tools. With that solid vocabulary and philosophy in place, we moved on to the “people side” of project management in the previous issue. By discussing the role of the project manager, we set the stage for our current focus, the project team.

Occasionally, a person will be in charge of a project and do all of the steps alone. But it’s more common for a project

manager to work closely with a variety of people who have specialized skills. Several key relationships are essential and ongoing. So these special people are usually asked to serve as members of the **project team**, the formal, legitimate work group which collaborates with the project manager from beginning to end. Even though each person brings individual expertise to the group and may be mostly working on one aspect of the project, the team focuses on the broad goals.

The team composition depends on the nature of the work, the available staff and the likelihood of volunteer or community involvement. The best teams consist of employees who work in the department as well as outsiders who can bring special skills and a fresh perspective. As project manager, you usually have no formal reporting authority over the team members and must work hard to generate involvement and commitment. This is an area where your interpersonal skills are essential because a team member’s willingness to serve may depend on previous experiences with you. In smaller organizations, the project team may consist of three people and you may not have many options in terms of who joins the group. In those situations, people skills are even more important because there may be less choice about participation.

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**A project is an organized, temporary endeavor
that creates a unique product or service.**

Over, please...

Team Contract

Even small teams should develop a project team contract which outlines the group's agreements and expectations related to working together. This contract may be a simple paragraph or an outline with bullets. What matters is that the group's operating rules be understood so assumptions are not made about decision making or reporting. A written contract draft should be developed and approved by the team; the agreements will be important during future meetings. For example, if the project team consists of several dominant, vocal people who tend to interrupt each other and talk when they please, the team contract might include a clause such as "only one person will speak at a time." If the problem persists, the project manager can ask the team to review the contract and evaluate team performance. This occasional reminder can serve as an incentive for good manners and keep everyone on task.

Team Roles

The goals of the team should be clarified at the first meeting. While the team goals will reflect the project goals, there may be some important differences. Again, it is important that the work is not done under an umbrella of assumptions. Some team roles just evolve naturally but some require more systematic consideration. Always determine in advance who will take minutes of the meeting. Perhaps one person will always serve as recorder, but if the duties are rotated, the recording member should know in advance. If one team member has a natural flair for marketing, that person might be the best choice for working with you to communicate project progress. But a person's job title should not automatically land them in their familiar role. In projects, there may be real value in having someone take on an area of work precisely because it is outside their normal duties. And, individual personalities should be used well. An extroverted social worker with presentation skills may be the ideal person to deliver a project update to the Board even though she would not normally meet with the group.

The real challenge is facilitating the team's work. When teams consist of people who have different skills, training and job duties, differences in language and experience naturally follow. So you must truly value the unique aspects of each person and make sure that the group works well together. Since teams move "beyond" job descriptions, each team member must have equal respect and standing. If the Director's administrative assistant is very knowledgeable about computer systems and he is asked to serve on the team, he must feel that his time and energy will be appreciated. In nonprofit projects, community

Sample Team Contract

Share information
Respect each other
Listen well
Be optimistic
Promote mutual
understanding of opinions
Be patient
Think outside the box
Speak one at a time
Have fun
See a clear vision.

representation on the team may be essential. These key stakeholders fulfill an educational role with their neighbors as well as offer guidance for the team members.

Completing the Team Responsibility Chart (page 4) is one simple way to clarify who is doing what and to move the project forward.

Project Communication

The project manager serves as the chief ambassador or cheerleader. In some cases, your name becomes so closely associated with the effort that you are the project. You can actually use this association to great advantage. Increase your visibility and get out of the office, away from the Gantt Charts and budgets. You may do your best project marketing at a soccer game or a consortium meeting. Every time you walk into the building, casual encounters serve as powerful tools for giving the project voice within the community.

You should also meet with the supervisors of the people who are serving on the team. When projects continue over long time periods, an employee's continuing absence can lead to resentment from colleagues and bosses. This sometimes results when regular reports on the project status are not shared. If the project manager remembers to include supervisors and other administrators in the reporting, then there is less room for conflict and misunderstanding. These supervisor meetings also provide a perfect opportunity to praise team members for their good work.

When problems arise in any of these areas, a good brainstorming session can do wonders. After team members have worked together for awhile, they may begin to predict what their colleagues will say in response to a question or issue. The group will need fresh perspectives from time to time and an invitation for a free wheeling brainstorming session may be effective. The meeting can also diffuse any grumbling about the "special treatment" for the project team. Ask your colleagues for their help in solving project problems and they'll support your goals.

In our next issue, we will discuss project meetings. In the meantime, be thinking about the qualities of effective meetings and how they can impact a project.

New Publication Marta's new manual is now available:

Project Management for Local Government IQ Report,
International City/County Management Association, 2004.

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TEAM RESPONSIBILITY CHART

Name of team member	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							

R = Primary Responsibility

S = Support (active involvement)

I = Keep Informed

C = Consult or provide advice