



Project Management for Development Organizations



The Roles of a Project Manager

One of the mistakes development organizations make is appointing a project manager only for the depth of her technical skills. It is not unusual to find a good engineer being promoted to project manager just for her technical competence. While it is true that one must have a good understanding of the technical aspects of the project, the principal areas of competence that are required from every project managers are in the management competence areas and these include communicating; planning, negotiating, coaching, decision-making, and leadership. These skills are often overlooked at the time of hiring or appointing a project manager; and they are supplemented by the functional support provided by the organizations back-office operations, such as accounting, human resource and logistics. One of the problems with this approach is that there is not a single person who is wholly responsible for the project.

Another common mistake is not properly defining the role of the project manager, usually the job descriptions are too vague and place too much emphasis on the technical competencies required for the job, organizations also make the mistake to assign to the project manager technical work, this may be true for certain small projects but for most of them the role of the project manager is one of integrator, communicator, and facilitator.

The project manager is the ultimate person accountable for the project she is the one whose job it is to make sure the project gets done, and is the principal contact person for the donor, beneficiaries and the key stakeholders. As responsible for the project she needs to make key decisions regarding the management of the resources available to the project; in order to do that, the organization's senior management needs to appoint the project manager and give her the sole responsibility and authority for project direction and control.

A Project Manager is also accountable to the Program Manager or Organization Director, depending on the size of the organization; and is accountable to the beneficiaries for delivering the project as planned. The Project Manager has the delegated authority to commit the organization on matters regarding performance that are within the scope of the project and the contract with the donor.

There are three critical roles of the project manager:

- Integrator
- Communicator
- Leader

Integrator

A key responsibility of the project manager is to ensure the proper integration of the project management processes and coordinate the process phases through the project management cycle, to ensure that all areas of the project come together to deliver the project to a successful conclusion. This is the main role of the project manager; it is not related to the technical responsibilities of the project, which in most cases are managed by the project staff. The role of integrator involves three specific areas of responsibility:

- Developing the project management plans, which involves the development of all project planning documents into a consistent, coherent project plan document
- Implementing the project plan, which involves the execution of the project plan and ensuring all activities are performed by all the people involved
- Monitor and control the plan, which involves measuring the initial results against the intended objectives and coordinating all changes to the plans.

Communicator

This is one of the main roles of the project manager, but one that is often overlooked and not properly taken in consideration when assigning a project manager to a new project.

A project manager is the person who has the overall responsibility for the successful planning and execution of a project.

Communication is providing relevant, timely information to the right people about the project. Communication is used to inform and educate the project stakeholders about the project objectives, risks, assumptions and constraints.

The communication or informational role is the most critical role for the success of the project, the organization functional managers, project staff, donors and key stakeholders need to make critical decision about the project, and the information they receive must be relevant, on time and accurate.

Project managers in the role of communicators take three functions: to gather information from project staff and other people involved with the project; distribute the information to stakeholders, which includes the donor, beneficiaries, and the organizations functional managers; and the last function is to transmit the information to the external environment, such as the general public to gain support to the project.

Leader

A project manager is above all a leader; the team needs direction for the life of the project and the project manager is responsible for leading the team to achieve the vision that the project has created, a project manager does this by facilitating, coordinating and motivating the team to achieve the project goals, this is a central role of the project manager and her ability to influence, inspire, direct, communicate will determine her effectiveness as a project manager.

Leading is a central role; it involves working with and through others to achieve the objectives of the project. It is through the project manager's ability to lead - which includes the ability to facilitate, coordinate, and motivate – that will determine the effectiveness of the project manager.

The focus on this role is to ensure the project team and the project stakeholders have a clear vision of the objectives the project aims to achieve. During the course of the project is not unusual that the team starts shifting its attention from the final objective; here is where the leadership role is needed and the project manager needs to communicate and motivate the team to the ultimate goal.

Facilitator

In this role the project manager acts an individual who enables the project team to work more effectively; helps them collaborate and achieve synergy. The project manager is not responsible to do all the tasks of the project, that is the responsibility of the project team, the project manager role is to create the right conditions that enable the project team to carry their duties.

The project manager also contributes by providing the framework to facilitate the interactions among the different groups so that they are able to function effectively. The goal of this role is to support the project team and the beneficiaries so that they can achieve exceptional performance.

The project manager encourages full participation from the project team, promotes mutual understanding with the beneficiaries and cultivates shared responsibility among all project stakeholders.

The facilitator role is mostly used when dealing with beneficiaries, since the project manager doesn't have any form of authority over this group he must provide a safe environment where beneficiaries feel comfortable contributing ideas and provide input to the project and discover the solutions that can help achieve the projects objectives.

These series of articles focuses on concepts and practices related to development projects. It is our hope that the ideas and methodologies presented here prove useful to anyone who is engaged in managing projects in the broader development community, and helps bring sustainable benefits to the communities and beneficiaries who need it the most.

The Millennium Development Goals aim by 2015 to reverse the grinding poverty, hunger and disease affecting billions of people.

PM4DEV is committed to provide resources and develop knowledge and expertise to support development organizations in their efforts to achieve this ambitious goal.



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