



Project Management for Development Organizations

Doing the Right Projects,
Doing the Projects Right

The Roles of the 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.

There are three basic roles for a project manager:

1. Integrator
2. Communicator
3. Leader

Integrator Role

Development of the Project Plan - A project plan is the document used to coordinate all the project activities and used as a guide to implement and monitor the project. Plans should be dynamic and the project manager role is to ensure the plans have a level of flexibility to allow changes as the project makes progress or when the project environment changes. A project plan is a tool the project manager uses to lead the project team and assess the status of the project.

Implementation of the Project Plan - Project plan implementation includes all the efforts necessary to achieve the project outcomes, implementing the plan is essentially a proactive role accomplished by a constant referral back to the project plan. This is the place where the project will spend most of its resources and it requires that the project manager monitors the performance of the project activities as described in the project plan.

Monitoring and Control of the Project Plan - Monitoring and controlling the project involves identifying, evaluating and managing changes throughout the project management cycle to ensure that changes are beneficial and contribute to the project success; communicate significant changes to management, beneficiaries and donors, especially the changes that will impact the project constraints, and update project plans and record changes.

Communicator Role

Project managers spend most of their time communicating. They hold meetings; develop reports (writing as well as orally) to the, donors, beneficiaries or project partners; they listen to issues; solve problems; provide direction and constantly negotiate for resources. Project managers' success depends greatly on their ability to communicate.

The project manager uses two forms of communication:

- Formal communications which include progress reports and presentations to management or to the beneficiaries.
- Informal communications which includes email messages, telephone calls, and team meetings

The effectiveness with which this role is used is important to the success of the project and the project manager.

Leadership Role

Facilitator - In this role the project manager supports the project team to work more effectively and helps them collaborate more efficiently to achieve a level of 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.

Coordinator - Coordination means integrating the goals and activities of the people and groups involved with the project. These groups include the functional units in the organizations, such as finance, human resources and procurement and the beneficiaries or the partners involved with the projects.

Motivator - Development projects are highly complex and demanding on the project staff, this is the reason why the project manager has to act as a motivator to the team in times of difficulty. Working with people is not always easy and the factors that provide them with motivation are different from each other.

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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