

Selecting the Right Project Manager

The Project Management Institute's, A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge defines a project as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. The Project Manager is the person assigned by the performing organization who applies knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project objectives.

Skills required to be an affective project manager are extensive. The right project manager requires adequate experience and knowledge of managing scope, time, cost, quality, risk, communication, resources, and procurement at a level that is appropriate for the size, complexity, and risk of the effort being managed. In addition to, planning, organizing, directing, and controlling project activities, resources, and stakeholders. Other required skills may also include items such as:

- Knowledge of the business climate, both internal and external to the organization, and any political considerations that may impact project dynamics or the ability to successfully deliver project outcomes
- The ability to integrate process and activities needed to identify, define, combine, unify, and coordinate the various project management processes and practices required to successfully deliver project outcomes
- The ability to effectively identify and manage risk in a manner that exploits, promotes, or enhances those risks that may have a positive impacts and avoids, transfers, or mitigates those risks that may have a negative impacts

Selecting the right project manager requires strong consideration of the before mentioned skills as well as other relevant items such as:

- The possibility of assigning multiple efforts to one project manager
- Quantitative skills and reasoning
- Part-time vs. full-time assignment
- Location, travel, culture, and language

- Efforts managed by functional managers
- Risk, complexity, and budget of the effort
- Technical requirements and understanding
- Type of past project management experience

Avoiding selection of the wrong project manager is just as important as the process and considerations given to selecting the right project manager. Common pitfalls avoid include items such as:

- Considering gray hair, baldness, or age as indicators of project management maturity. This is not necessarily the right type of maturity. The right project manager has most likely gained maturity through exposure to multiple projects of varying types in a diverse assortment of positions, projects, offices, companies, and industries. For example, an individual who has managed the same type of projects for the same company for twenty years will possess decades of project experience. However, due to the lack of diversity in their experience, their breadth of management knowledge it is most likely very limited and thus they are more likely to fail if placed in a management position of a different type of project.
- Personality type and the tactical approach to working with data and dealing with people. Project managers often do not have direct control over many of the factors that comprise project success. Maturity in project management assumes maturity in dealing with people. Project success is often achieved through a manager's ability to influence factors that contribute to desirable outcomes. The right project manager must be flexible and able to vary their leadership style and tactical approaches to accommodate the various situations and people one will encounter over the life of a project.
- Assigning an individual as project manager simply based on their availability at that time or because they are good at what the project will deliver. Project management is more an art than a science. Success is dependent upon the manager's ability to simultaneously manage resources, scope, risk, time, and budgets; to understand the implications of various decisions and how to resolve conflicts impacting successful delivery of project outcomes.



- Assuming technical projects require managers with a strong technical background. Promoting technical staff to the role of project manager may be appropriate in certain circumstances. However, it also promotes additional risk because the greater the managers technical expertise the more likely it is that they will overly involve themselves in the technical details of the project rather than managing the project. These details, and other specialized work, should be left to the various subject matter experts that make up project team. Far more often than not, the right project manager only requires a general understanding of the technical aspects of the project and more importantly, possesses the proper management traits, skills, and experience necessary to work with people, remove barriers, and deliver results.
- Appointing individuals as managers at the request of stakeholders or to simply expose them to project management. Although developing and training perspective management staff is important the risk associated with assigning them as project managers before they are ready is great.
- Assuming that because an individual has held a variety of roles across the performing organization that they will make a good project manager. Often this is an indication of just the opposite as they have been shuffled around because of their inability to perform any of those roles. Unfortunately, removing underperformers from an organization is often done by moving them up to get them out of the way.

Some approaches to prepare candidate staff to become project managers may include:

- Formal education, training, special courses, and certification programs
- Internal training, related project management initiatives, programs, and support information
- Experience learning on the job as assistants to qualified, seasoned project managers
- Professional associations, seminars, meetings, and communities of practice
- Trade publications, newsletters, and personal readings

For more information on project management, the Project Management Community of Practice or the CDC UP please visit the CDC Unified Process website at <http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/>. ■

Project Management Community of Practice

- **January 28, 2011**
Impact of CIMS/CITS on Projects
- **February 25, 2011**
CPIC for Project Managers
- **March 25, 2011**
Managing Change
- **April 29, 2011**
Developing Meaningful and Measurable Metrics
- **May 27, 2011**
SharePoint for Success
- **June 24, 2011**
A Conversation with CDC's COO
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Leadership
- **September 30, 2011**
Dig Deeper into Microsoft Project
- **October 28, 2011**
Information Security 101 for Project Managers
- **December 02, 2011**
Enterprise Architecture

For more information on the Project Management Community of Practice visit the PMCoP website at <http://www2.cdc.gov/cdcup/library/pmcp/> ■

CDC Unified Process Presentations

The CDC UP offers a short overview presentation to any CDC employee and/or contractor group. Presentations are often performed at your facility, on a day of the week convenient for your group, and typically take place over lunch structured as one hour lunch-and-learn style meeting.

Contact the CDC Unified Process at cdcup@cdc.gov or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup> to arrange a short overview presentation for your group. ■

Contact the CDC Unified Process

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