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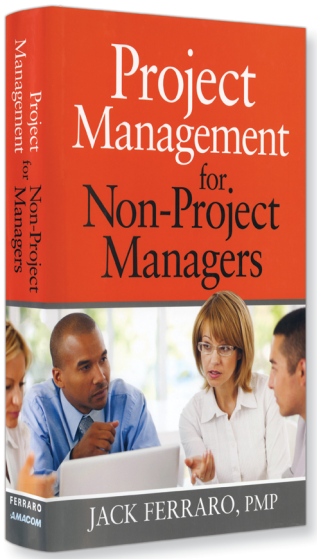
Project Management for Non-Project Managers



by Jack Ferraro, PMP

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

As a manager, you may feel that "project teams" brought in to accomplish goals and objectives affecting your department may as well have crash-landed from another planet, speaking a jargon-filled language all their own and referring to complex-looking graphs and charts you don't recognize. Yet, it's your responsibility to ensure that the results of a project initiative have a positive effect, benefiting your department, your customers and, ultimately, your organization. You may not be a certified project manager — or even have been trained in the basics of project management — but without an understanding of how project management works, you may be doing a disservice to your department, your company … and even your career.

Whether you're being asked to work together with a project management team or are eager to put proven project management techniques to work for you, this book will enable you to use the tools that will help you become a productive spearhead of change in your organization.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to productively engage with project managers and teams to increase the probability of real business value being created from the project.
- Tips to eliminate the unnecessary work that often slows projects down.
- Ways to manage risk and prevent changing requirements from derailing the completion of important milestones.

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PART I: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE FUNCTIONAL MANAGER IN PROJECT SUCCESS

The most common vehicle for implementing change within an organization is the project or a combination of projects known as a program. Projects are becoming more strategic in nature and scope, and an increasing number of traditional white-collar workers are involved with projects in some fashion. These projects often require unprecedented collaboration within an organization's lines of business and across the business enterprise. This dynamic is creating a need for functional managers to work in collaboration, communicate effectively and appreciate the best-practice methods of project teams.

What the Functional Manager Should Know About the Project Organization

Many functional managers reject project management methodologies, processes and terminology because project teams either consistently miss their deliverable dates or over-run their budgets. This leads functional managers to underestimate the value of project management in general and feeds attitudes of "project management is a waste of time," or "project management slows down the process," or "project management is just a bunch of bureaucratic silliness." Such attitudes create a formidable barrier between project teams and their business units.

Who Is the Functional Manager?

In traditional project management literature, a functional manager is anyone with management authority over an organizational unit — such as a department — within a business, company or other organization. Functional managers are not necessarily affiliated with a project team, nor are they directly involved in the day-to-day management of the project. However, they are supposed to ensure that the team's goals and objectives are aligned with the organization's overall strategy and vision. And the functional manager is responsible for providing the project team with the resources needed to complete the project.

The Challenge of Integrating the Project Team into the Organization

The challenge is getting members of the project team to see the big picture and how their work is affecting the organization's overall long-term goals. The solution is establishing a customer-focused project team that creates an integrated provider/customer relationship. And you as the functional manager must accept your role as the spearhead of change and take this step yourself. You cannot rely on your project manager, your Project Management Office (PMO — the standards enforcers) or your project sponsor (the financier and visionary of the project) to integrate this team into the project organization.

The Functional Manager's Role in Creating an Integrated Project Organization

The structuring of the project organization must clearly define the role of the functional manager as an educated consumer. Whether in IT, marketing or accounting,

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whether running a collection department or managing the faculty, the functional manager can define what is needed and enhance the project team's understanding of the business need. Therefore, the functional manager needs to be the catalyst for transferring critical knowledge in order to establish a true provider/customer partnership. When they become project management aware, functional managers can better participate in project planning sessions, understand why key planning documents are needed, interpret project reporting artifacts and recognize when project teams are wasting precious time and resources. The sooner this awareness occurs, the sooner you will see dramatic increases in project performance.

Three Types of Organizational Structure

Functional managers must understand the type of organizational structure in which they are operating, its impact on projects and the implications for the project manager, the project team and themselves. Three basic structure scenarios exist:

Functional. The functional organization structure aligns around the major functions of the business. Typically, they can no longer adapt to the changes of their competitors or demands from their customers. Most projects in such organizations underachieve their promise by between 20 and 70 percent, and project and functional managers become cynical. Success of the project is often associated with keeping the project boundaries within the functional manager's control. The more other departments or organizations get involved in the project, the greater the probability of conflict and poor project management.

Projectized. At the other end of the spectrum is a projectized organization, one that is primarily aligned around projects or programs. The planning, execution and control of projects and programs is usually a part of the organization's core business, and revenue is often tied to the successful completion of projects. Project management processes are mature, and financial tracking of project expenditures is ingrained into management information systems.

Matrix. The most common type of organizational structure, and the one in which most of us work, is the matrix organization. The grid-like structure allows a company to address multiple business dimensions using multiple command structures. However, matrix organizations may lack clear authority definition, which can lead to role ambiguity — the greatest obstacle to any project. Some may require significant administrative and overhead resources to support the matrix.

The Importance of Project Planning

When you, as the functional manager, partner in the planning process, the project organization will gain foresight from your collaboration. Foresight is accomplished by being close to the project's work, its outputs and consumption, without disrupting it.

A solid project plan allows both you and the project manager to work in the present with a plan for the future. Without it, you are no longer leading, but reacting to events. When a project is in trouble, teams find themselves continually reacting to the latest crisis. The project plan becomes outdated as tasks and activities become disconnected from the plan. Foresight moves the team from surviving crisis after crisis, which erodes trust and ignites fear, to executing with creativity and confidence.

What Is a Good Plan?

A good project plan should increase the confidence of stakeholders that the objectives set out for the project are achievable within the organization's parameters, particularly the budget, the time allotted and the project scope or functionality. A good plan does the following:

- It lays out an entire scope of the project in a manner that is easily understood and agreed upon by stakeholders and decision makers.
- It tells a simple story of how project work unfolds in a logical sequence and identifies the key decision points and milestones that must be reached before additional work can proceed.
- It presents 30 days of detailed activities and deliverables that show obvious progress or lack thereof.
- It presents uncertainty in a manner that stakeholders can comprehend, so they can then take appropriate action.

Basic Steps to Planning Projects

A project plan is an input to the execution or completion of the work of that project plan. Executing the plan is as simple as doing what you say you will do. However, creating the plan documents can be more complex. Here are eight of the most important steps:

1. Establishing project objectives
2. Developing the project scope
3. Decomposing/deconstructing the project into deliverables
4. Identifying resources
5. Defining activities

6. Estimating resources, costs and durations
7. Scheduling the work
8. Determining the budget

Summary of Project Planning

As someone new to project management and project planning, you may benefit from remembering these points:

- This planning process is iterative; each pass through these steps adds more detail to the plan.
- This process must be done in a true provider/customer partnership; the project team is not likely to be successful unless you are engaged and committed to creating a meaningful project plan.
- The goal is to get an initial plan created and then begin to execute; then do more planning and more executing. Momentum is generated by the accomplishment of incremental activities that the team said they would do.
- Don't be overwhelmed by the detailed project schedules and other PMO templates. Demand simple, meaningful project plans that can validate the competency of the project manager and the teams' ability to execute.

Understanding the Business Side of the Project

Project teams and their members move rapidly from one project to the next and are often under tremendous pressure to produce deliverables and results. Arriving quickly, then disappearing as they move on to the next urgent organizational need, project teams are becoming business and knowledge agnostics. Yet specific business knowledge is essential for project success, and the critical role of providing the relevant business knowledge to the project team belongs to you, the functional manager. This business knowledge becomes the foundation for project requirements, a key component to your project scope.

The Connection Between Business Knowledge and Requirements

Poor requirements are a common cause of project failure and are often rooted in a lack of understanding of the business. Although project managers pride themselves on being generalists, they often fail to acquire and utilize the business matter expertise that is available to help them on projects. As a result, changing requirements and scope creep can lead projects to the grave.

Writing Good Requirements

What exactly is a requirement? It's vital that you, the functional manager, have an in-depth understanding of what project managers mean by "requirement," because the project team will rely on you to communicate requirements for documentation as a part of the project scope.

A requirement is a condition or capability needed by a user to solve a problem or achieve an objective. Often, a system must meet or possess this condition or capability to satisfy a contract, standard, specification or other formally imposed document. Thus, the provider will be relying on you to provide clear, articulate information. The most common mistake is not considering requirements in light of a business process or processes. Understanding business process impacts is critical, not only to the specific process on which you may be focusing but also to related processes.

Scope Creep

One phase that almost everyone in basic project management training classes seems to understand is scope creep. Next to requirements, it seems to be the most-used layman's term in the daily events of project life. Scope creep is directly related to requirements and their mismanagement. It has many root causes besides poor requirements, such as undisciplined customers, use of the wrong system development methodology, and not having clear linkages of requirements to the business process. Further impact can come from changes in the business environment, new regulations, market demands, competition and cost factors.

The Ideal Functional Manager in the Project Organization

Functional managers who are asked to drive strategic change in their organization must be prepared to lead and have qualities that make working on such projects a success.

"Get It"… or Risk Getting Moved Out

Functional managers who are asked to step outside of their normal duties and participate in important projects need to adopt the following principles:

1. Take ownership of the responsibilities of being a good customer.
2. Embrace the provider/customer relationship.
3. Make decisions based on facts, not feelings.
4. Connect the project with organizational strategy.
5. Recognize the importance of structure in projects.

6. Get comfortable working outside your zone.
7. Understand the success factors of organizational change:
    a. Create urgency.
    b. Structure a powerful alliance.
    c. Vision the change.
    d. Communicate the vision.
    e. Remove obstacles.
    f. Create momentum with quick wins.
    g. Don't declare victory too soon.
    h. Embed the change into your culture and systems.
8. Be willing to take risks.

PART II: FOUR CRITICAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS FOR FUNCTIONAL MANAGERS

Articulating the Real Customer Need and Business Case for the Project

A fundamental understanding of project management is one step; understanding your role in the provider/customer relationship is another. Now you must acquire the skills to complement those of your provider.

A skill lacking in many projects is the ability to find and articulate the real customer need, a need that is met by a mission. This skill must be applied during the initiation of projects but often is glossed over. If you expect a project team to deliver results and the project to provide the desired benefits, you must play a central role in articulating the need. Users have a sense of the needs but do not realize their implications. Sponsors and executives know the benefits they want but often do not fully understand the details of how to get them. This is where you fit in. You must be able to translate the sponsors' vision into real needs, potential solutions and process changes.

Understanding the real need of your project is a discovery process, one that involves continual dialogue and collaboration, which implies that a relationship must exist between the provider and customers. Discovering the real need requires you and the project manager (the customer/provider partnership) to pursue an open and honest dialogue with all members of the project team. The dialogue should include questions such as

- Why does capacity need to increase or cost need to decrease?
- How much does it need to increase/decrease?
- How is it measured?
- What if this need is not met? What happens? Who is at risk?
- Who ultimately benefits from having these needs met?

The questions must be pursued vigorously and satisfactorily answered if everyone is to comprehend and buy into the mission. Once you have the answers, you can complete the following critical steps:

1. Produce a compelling project mission statement based on real needs.
2. Create a meaningful current state and future state comparison.
3. Base your requirements on the business process.
4. Prepare a realistic business case for your project.

Staying Focused on Project Deliverables

As a functional manager, your goal is to keep the project team and your stakeholders focused on deliverables. This does not mean that you need to become an expert at decomposing/deconstructing deliverable structures, also known as work breakdown structures (WBS). However, deliverable structures are a fundamental element of project planning, one that is often misunderstood and incorrectly used.

The Deliverable Structure: A Portrait of the Work

A deliverable structure can be considered a portrait of the work. Provider/customer partnerships must be effective in creating a portrait — preferably using graphics — that aligns with the real need and vision of the project. This planning document is built with and for the customer and team members. It is essential for defining the scope and then executing and controlling the project.

A simple process to create a deliverable structure is as follows:

1. Identify the final product of the project. This is the top level of the deliverable structure and may also be the project name.
2. Identify the major components of the product, service, or result to be created (product approach) or the sequence of phases of the project (phase approach).

3. Decompose/deconstruct the major deliverables within each component, following the rules of deliverable structures:
   - Each element should be a single, tangible deliverable.
   - Each element should be an aggregation of subordinate elements.
   - Deliverables should be unique and distinct.
4. Review and refine with stakeholders.

Deliverables vs. Activities

The process of identifying lower level deliverables is called decomposition (deconstruction), meaning breaking down the deliverables into smaller, more manageable components. The common mistake is to dive immediately into tasks or activities when decomposing your project. Our brains are trained to think in terms of actions first, not outputs. Understanding these two terms is important:

- Deliverables are any tangible work product (e.g., documentation, analysis, process map, data file, software interface).
- Activities or tasks are actions performed to create deliverables (e.g., create draft specifications, conduct meeting, review plan).

Thinking about activities at this point is fine, but you should think through activities to the point of creating an output or tangible deliverable.

Missing Pieces

If your project manager takes the initiative to develop a straw model of the deliverable structure and present it to you, make sure he has included the following five components that are often missed:

1. Integration. Technology projects commonly have multiple system efforts in scope, and these systems likely have to communicate or integrate with each other. Each system may have its own deliverables for requirements, design, code, etc. But the project also needs deliverables that address any integration points.

2. Business analysis. Business process modeling deliverables are often left out by project managers with a technical orientation. The development of current and future state processes and a gap analysis should be in the structure.

3. Testing. Although testing deliverables are not usually left out, they may be less visible than they should be on the deliverable structure. If they are subdeliverables of a build stage, the effort is likely to be underestimated. If testing is a critical component of the project, elevate it to level one or two in the deliverable structure. A common problem is project managers' borrowing time from testing to make up for slippage that occurs in earlier phases. The more visibility testing has, the harder it is for them to do this.

4. Communications. For change initiatives, communications are critical components. These could be newsletters, websites and email campaigns to drive the behavior in project customers that produce benefits.

5. Project management. Project management deliverables consume time and resources and must be a part of any deliverable structure. This category includes not just planning documents but status reports, regular project updates and project reporting deliverables.

Maintenance of Your Deliverable Structure

Your project manager is responsible for updating the deliverable structure on a regular basis. Here is a good test to determine whether your project scope is stable: Walk around the halls of your project team and ask them what they are working on, with a copy of the deliverable structure in hand or at least in your mind. If team members are engaged in efforts that do not directly relate to a deliverable on the deliverable structure, then you have potential problems. Either the scope has changed and the deliverable structure does not reflect the actual work (a common occurrence), or team members are working on unapproved changes, which is, unfortunately, an even more common occurrence.

Understanding Key Project Dependencies

Once you have mastered defining the work of the project in a deliverable structure — the portrait of the project — you must enhance this by developing the high-level dependencies between these deliverables. Think of it in terms of telling the story of the work — how it plays out, what work must be done before other work can start, and what are the critical relationships between deliverables. Your deliverable structure is an input to this story of the work. The story of the work illustrates critical decision points for primary and secondary stakeholders and shows where customer acceptance — sign-off — occurs. It also provides insight into risks: If this deliverable is not done properly, it will impact the quality of other project management deliverables.

Sequencing project work and the project management output of this process can be complex. Your goal as a functional manager is to keep it simple and tell a story to

your stakeholders that they can easily understand. You do not need training in project management scheduling or on sophisticated project management software. That is for your project manager; he or she should be experienced in the details and nuances of producing an accurate schedule with a critical path and be proficient in using the software tools that produce it.

The common mistake is to let your project manager sequence the details of the work without input from you and the primary and secondary stakeholders. Often, project managers believe this is a purely technical task of working through the dependencies of project work, which only they can figure out. The solution is to create simple, high-level sequence diagrams that depict the major relationships among the significant deliverables (the story), which you defined in your deliverable structure (the portrait).

Another benefit of getting the story of the work in front of primary stakeholders early is the ability to successfully negotiate scope, schedule and cost. Sponsors tend to drastically cut schedules while not wanting to compromise scope or quality. If you involve the customer and sponsors in the deliverable structure creation at the appropriate level, the proper use of a simple flow diagram highlights the risks of compressing timelines.

Being Proactive About Project Risk

Another critical skill is the articulation of risk. Project managers must understand risk management processes, but your role in the partnership is to create an environment where risk can be discussed openly and prudently.

Here is the problem: Project managers are notorious for capturing issues, assumptions and hidden risks around projects and aggregating them into lengthy lists that get little attention and quickly become outdated. Articulating risks with clarity makes them real and manageable. A project manager may be more focused on the technical risks that impact their personal interest, such as meeting a deadline or budget constraint.

Another problem is that many organizations have a culture that frowns on talking about risk. "Risk" is a forbidden four-letter word; it implies that a situation is out of control.

Basics of Risk

Risk is based on uncertainty about the future. What creates risk is a possible event or condition that, if it occurs, will affect at least one project objective, such as scope, schedule, cost or quality. Without a clear definition and understanding of your objectives, risk management becomes more difficult. Risk conditions could include aspects of the project or organization's environment, outdated technology, untrained project workers, turnover or uninterested customers. Risks could be related to the project-specific work, the relationships between deliverables or the relationships between stakeholders.

Every project has known risks, those that can be identified, but projects also have unknown risks, which cannot be managed proactively. Project leaders address known risks by identifying and analyzing them and then creating response plans. Response plans that mitigate risks — reducing their probability and/or impact — are a part of your scope and budget. The unknown risks, those that cannot be identified or proactively responded to, are not part of your baseline scope or budget, but you may allocate a contingency fund or plan to managing them.

An issue is not the same as a risk; rather, an issue is the result of a project risk that has actually occurred. Remember, project risk is always in the future. Risk management should be embedded in all project planning processes and all common processes in all projects. These common processes are:

- Initiation
- Planning
- Executing
- Monitoring and controlling
- Closing

Risk Management Process

The risk management process is intuitive and can be summarized in five steps:

1. Decide how you will handle risks on your project in general. You should determine how to approach and plan for project risk, identify the level of risks and types of risks to be managed and decide what level of management visibility is required. Keep in mind that management visibility should be consistent with the risk's level of importance.

2. Identify actual risks. Your key inputs into risk identification are project artifacts with which you are familiar:

- Mission statements
- Deliverable structure and acceptance criteria
- Flow diagram
- Requirements
- Stakeholder analysis

3. Quantify the risks. Risk events always have two elements:

I. The probability of the event occurring in the future.
II. Its potential impact on your project objectives.

If your objectives are vague, the impacts or risk events will be vaguer and will generate no interest or concern from your stakeholders. Risks have sources or causes, which may include changes in requirements or scope, design errors, poorly defined roles and responsibilities, poor estimates, lack of skills and staff turnover. Based on your project's objectives, you must determine how likely these risks are and the specific impacts they would cause.

4. Prioritize the quantified risks, and discuss responses with stakeholders and team members. Responses can fall into the following four categories: Accept or ignore the risk. Avoid the risk. Transfer the risk. Mitigate the risk.

5. Continue to monitor your risks. This includes continual identification of new risks that appear and others that go away as project work progresses.

An excellent place to find risks is in your assumptions list. Assumptions are project conditions that are assumed to be true in your project, and documenting them will help validate the accuracy of your project plan and determine when changes need to be made. Assumptions can be dangerous if they are not continually validated as being true. A typical software project may have an assumption that user security profiles are accurate based on business manager sign-off. A project manager leaves this as an assumption, but you should translate the assumption into a risk event, such as, if user role security profiles are incorrect, the resulting changes to user profile security after user acceptance testing will create the need for additional test cycles, increasing testing costs by 5 percent.

With a specific risk event, a discussion can occur about the probability of the risk event, risk sources, and decisions can be made about acceptance, mitigation and subsequent planning activities. Too often, risks get documented as generic issues or assumptions or, even worse, pushed under the table. By properly identifying the risk event or condition and its probability and potential impact, the sources can be rooted out and mitigation plans built into the project plan.

The Power of Principles

When facing the temptation of the latest project management fads — automated PMOs, Agile PM certifications, Lean Project Management — it's useful to revisit some basic principles:

- **Relationships are extremely important.** Trust-based relationships make it possible to survive the chaos that change in organizations brings to people's lives.
- **Good planning is essential to project management.** A good plan has the right amount of detail for the specific situation, it arrives in the right time to align stakeholders and is easy to comprehend.
- **No matter how good you are at building relationships and planning projects, you must still be able to execute.** Executing the project plan begins with communicating it to your stakeholders. Those initial encounters with your key stakeholders are truly critical because the first impressions of your plan are lasting.
- **Strategic plans are embroiled in conflict — conflicts between the status quo and agents of change, the risk averse and the risk takers, the pacifiers and inciters.** This conflict must be awakened for the organization to address and resolve the tension that has long been dormant. Without that tension, the organization is not likely to move forward. Managing this conflict is a part of the landscape. How you manage it will determine whether the conflict becomes positive energy to support lasting, fundamental change in the organization or whether it becomes negative energy, worsening the organization's inability to change.

Projects cannot be successfully executed by a project team alone. As a functional manager, you must step out of your normal duties and participate in important projects. You must take ownership of the responsibilities of being a good customer, embrace the provider/customer relationship, integrate the project team into the business and keep it aligned with the organizational strategy. You must facilitate good decision-making based on facts and recognize and participate in the structure and planning necessary to execute projects. Finally, you must be willing to take risks and work outside your comfort zone. Ultimately, you need to "get it," or risk being moved aside.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Project Management for Non-Project Managers*, you'll also like:

1. ***A Manager's Guide to Project Management*** **by Michael Bender**. Written for senior executives, this title offers strategies to add value to the process of project management.

2. ***Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers*** **by Anthony Mersino**. Learn the essential tools of EQ to master the most difficult part of project management: handling people.

3. ***Finding Allies, Building Alliances*** **by Michael Leavitt and Rich McKeown**. Discover how to build a network to accomplish any goal