



**Project Management
White Paper Series**

Who is on your side?

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Who is on your side?

by Keith Fournier

Projects are difficult to manage. They can generate many challenges. A project, by definition, is a temporary endeavor that will create a new product or service. Therefore, a project manager is charged with forcing change. Implementing new systems almost always results in changes in business processes. People are very resistant to change. Change pushes people out of their comfort zone and breeds fear throughout organizations. What generates this fear? It is usually derived from the concern of losing their job. How will they pay for their "stuff?" Change becomes very personal to all project stakeholders. Fear can even be palpable with the use of excellent project management methodology, such as clearly defining and communicating project scope and impact. Therefore, a project manager has to enjoy the challenges and rewards of being a change agent. This position can be very stressful. Most of the time, the project manager is trying to solve problems. It can be said, "project management is fun if it wasn't for the conflict". Since projects are of such impact to an organization, the project manager has to identify "who is on their side" and know when to use their skills and authority.

The project manager is charged with the tasks of managing the time and budgeting the resources assigned to the project to obtain the project deliverables. As a result, most of the project manager's time is spent resolving conflict. How does the PM get the authority to resolve conflicts? Authority is granted to the project manager in the Project Charter. By definition, the project charter is the document issued by the project sponsor that formally authorized the existence of the project, and provides the project manager with the authority to apply organizational resources to project activities (Project Management Body of Knowledge, PMI). Issues can occur in a project that is beyond the authority of the project manager. If this occurs, the project manager should analyze and document the situation, identify potential alternatives, and recommend a solution. This document can then be escalated to the project sponsor for resolution. The project sponsor is the highest formally identified person with the authority to spend additional resources or to mediate a resolution between company functional areas or the consulting vendor. Project sponsors tend to be upper management within the organization. It is always recommended to provide upper management with solutions to ratify and not problems to solve. The project manager should be willing to present a solution and get endorsement to implement the solution.

Projects may also have a project champion. This is the person that can be considered the project's cheerleader and its greatest stakeholder. For example, if the project consists of implementing a new enterprise document imaging system, the records center director would be the project champion. Project Champion is the visionary that understands the business need for the project, facilitates organizational change issues related to the project, and communicates with both the internal project team and the external stakeholders. The project manager and project champion is sometimes the same person. However, it is best to separate these project functions. This allows the project manager to remain objective and minimize the use of emotions in project decisions.

The project manager has to consider the needs of every stakeholder in the project. Project stakeholders include a person or organization (e.g. customers, sponsor, performing organization or the public) that is actively involved in the project, of whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by the execution or completion of the project. A stakeholder may also exert influence over the project and its deliverables. (PMBOK, PMI) A project manager does not always consider the people that are negatively affected by the outcome of the project. If people will lose their jobs, the ability to have them actively and positively engaged is greatly reduced. Few people would like to help install a new system that will put them out of a job. It is more likely that they will try to sabotage the project to "save" their jobs.

Stakeholders have varying levels of influence in the execution of the project activities or project deliverables. A project stakeholder assessment can be performed. It will identify who are the stakeholders, how much the stakeholder will be impacted, and how much influence does the stakeholder have toward the success or failure of the project. The stakeholders can then be grouped into governing bodies, project team, clients, and other bodies. Each stakeholder should then be classified based several elements. These elements are stakeholder attitude, degree of influence and power, relative geo-location, and degree of open conflict. The project team should perform the assessment during the project initiation. It should also be reviewed and updated at the beginning of each subsequent phase or milestone. This technique should be integrated into an organization's project management methodology. It helps identify stakeholder risks and allow the team to address any potential issues early in the project life cycle.

Some organizations have a higher utilization and integration of project management practices. This is only possible when senior management realizes its benefits and institutes project management methodology as standard practice. Even with high level support, it could take several years for project management to become fully mature within an organization. One method to accelerate its adoption is to establish a project management office (PMO). A project management office can supply standardized methodologies, metrics, historical data and benchmarking data to the project manager and team. The PMO staff constantly update organizational project management assets and researches ways to improve project methodology. Establishing a PMO does add to overhead costs, but in the long term, the investment will pay for itself and provide great benefits to an organization.

Project management methodology adoption can occur at several levels. The maturity of an organization's project management utilization is based several levels of integration. Dr. Harold Kerzner, from his book, "Project Management, A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling," discusses five levels in his Project Management Maturity Model (PMMM). These levels are common language, common processes, singular methodology, benchmarking, and continuous improvement. An organization's project management maturity occurs when it has already mastered the basic knowledge of project management, defined its processes, established process controls and is able to achieve process improvement. Research has determined that project management maturity within an organization can greatly increase the probability of project success. The 2006 Project Management Institute (PMI) Pulse of the Profession Survey reveals that very few, only 11%, of the organizations surveyed indicated they have a mature project management environment. With this maturity, these organizations report 73% of projects are completed on time, 69% are done within budget, and only 10% of project are terminated. In contrast, 45% of responding organizations believe they have a low project management maturity environment. These organizations indicated only 42% of their projects were delivered on time, 44% on budget and terminated 13% of all their projects. Therefore, this survey provides evidence that project management maturity supported by senior management can produce better results in the implementation of projects.

Organizations often attempt to reduce project risk by contracting with external consultants with specialized skills and experience. Costs for implementation are

always higher with consultants and add another dimension of complexity. However, the probability of success is also greatly increased. These external resources are typically from a private sector company. Therefore, these organizations have profit as their motive. Can this cause problem? Yes, as the risk of budget overruns may be increased. For example, the vendor may have a project manager assigned to the project. The consulting firm's intent is to perform activities to produce desired project deliverables. The consultant's project manager has the same directives as the internal project manager to finish the project within time, budget and requirements. However, will the vendor's project manager always make decisions in the best interest of your organizations?

Implementing a software system includes configuring it to the requirements of the owner. Some business processes cannot be changed to be congruent with standard system configurations. As a result, it may be necessary to customize the software to achieve the desired results. There is a difference between configuration and customization. Configuration is the steps involved with "flicking switches" to have the system perform as required. A customization may include a change in source code. Recompiling source code introduces significant risk to the project and the system. It may have unforeseen cascading effects and could void support from the original software company. It is much easier to change business process and develop workarounds than deal with this risk. The recommendation is to never change source code.

Project managers may allow system customizations in an effort to reduce project conflict and gain user support. As previously discussed, this strategy is very dangerous. Be aware, information technology implementation consultants love customizations. I have heard consultants say, "the customer can have anything they would want, it just costs money." The customizations lead to change orders that can increase vendor profit. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but customizations will inevitably cause a continued dependency on the consultant during future upgrades and possibly operational support. Why? Because the customization is already out of scope and full documentation is seldom included in the change order cost. This is in an effort to keep the customization cost as low as possible. Any customizations should include a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of that change. TCO should be calculated for the development, testing, implementation and operations over a 3-5 year life cycle. This estimate should be brought to the project's Change Control Board (CCB) for review and approval. At no time should a project manager approve

a customization without project sponsor understanding and approval.

The project manager usually finds that they have all of the responsibility of completing the project, but little authority to be effective. Therefore, the project manager must accomplish their goals by influence management, but this is not always effective. Who is on the side of the project manager? If problems occur, who in your organization has the experience to deal with these problems? A project manager may be greatly helped by a project advocate. A project advocate is a non-biased third-party that could be paid by the project owner or both the project owner and the vendor consultant. A client advocate can assist in several phases of the project life cycle.

Technology vendors often have consultants on staff that could present themselves as your advocate. They can certainly provide your organization with the necessary applications, services or equipment. However, these vendor-consultants are typically involved with the sales process of their firm and profit from your decision to engage them. This relationship may not provide the necessary leverage needed by your organization because of their lack of neutrality. Experienced client advocate consultants can provide vendor management knowledge and expertise to give you confidence when dealing with the challenges inherent with information technology projects.

When is a client advocate needed the most? Client advocates can help in many situations. They can assist in the negotiating deliverables and resolving conflicts. Some conflicts are so large they may lead to project failure. A distressed project is on the path to failure but has not been classified as such by the project stakeholders. When a project is on this negative path, team members tend to retreat, limit communication and try to minimize impact to their career. This often happens when there is little support from upper management. A project manager should know their limitations and identify when there may be a need for another opinion on the status of the project and provide strategies to close the project. Identifying problems with a project and organize an appropriate response is best done by an unbiased third party.

The advocate's goal is not to assign blame. Experience reveals the most productive approach is to detach from past events, evaluate the current situation, and obtain consensus on how to proceed. Steps toward salvaging a "less than optimal" project include realigning project objectives, analyze impact to time, budget requirements, and build a strategy to manage

expectations of the project stakeholders. Finally, gain consensus on the new strategy and establish the updated plan for project completion.

A qualified client advocate will possess many skills and have proven experience in negotiation, project management, and system implementations. It should be noted that a good client advocate is not just a hired "gun" to help blame the vendor. Though paid by the project owner experienced and ethical advocate consultants may have to tell a client that they are wrong. For example, the members of the project team are supposed to be engaged in the project for 20 hours a week each. Analysis determines the internal team is only working about 10 hours a week. The triple constraint postulate states the three aspects of a project are time, cost and requirements. These are constrained by resources. If the resources are not available to work on the project, it will either take more time to complete, the consultant will have to backfill at a higher cost or the project requirements have to be reassessed. Sometimes it takes a third party to escalate the problem to senior management for them to finally address the issue. As for the vendor, they may welcome the addition of a client advocate for the project owner. Vendors appreciate fair and experienced client advocates who will overcome the project issues. Many times, project challenges are not solely associated with the vendor. However, the vendor is blamed because of their position as the external resource.

Conflict is part of every project. Project managers should be prepared to deal with adversity from every direction. People learn from their mistakes, well most do. A good project manager may have been involved with several "less than optimal" projects. Therefore, adversary builds experience to handle conflict. Some rules to minimize project conflict include: having clear requirements, well developed scope statement, and defined responsibilities with deliverable date. For a project manager to have better chance for managing a project successfully, the following items should be present in the development of the project plan.

- 1) Have a formal project charter document delivered to the project team by the project sponsor.
- 2) Involve the project sponsor with as many status meetings as possible and ask for their visibility to the project team.
- 3) Ensure the project sponsor has provided the project the project manager the necessary authority to be successful.
- 4) Provide the necessary communications to the project sponsor.

- 5) Continuously engage the project champion to keep momentum toward project completion.
- 6) Identify all project shareholders and perform a shareholder assessment to reveal and quantify risks.
- 7) Consider establishing a project management office (PMO) to provide benchmarking and historical data for the planning of the project and assist in the administration of the project.
- 8) Gain support from upper management to help establish and mature project management methodology in your organization.
- 9) Consider using a third-party client advocate to help with project conflicts or in distressed projects.
- 10) Understand that projects produce conflicts and to immediately deal with issues.

Project management is a career path that has many rewards and challenges. If the project manager can leverage the “people on their side,” it will lead to many successes and greater career advancement.

About the Author

Keith Fournier, PMP, APMC, CMS, GISP (keith@isdLtd.com) is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and has an Advanced Project Management Certification (APMC) with 17 years of GIS and IT project management experience. Keith was most recently the CIO and GIO for the award winning GIS and technology programs in Lucas County, Ohio. He is now the president of Innovative Systems Design Limited (www.isdLtd.com). ISD is an enterprise technology management consulting firm specializing in Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Enterprise Content Management (ECM) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) strategic planning, acquisition and implementation.

