

Project Management: The Boundless Profession

by Michael G. Martin, PMP



In this age of the "new economy," our perception of an organization's value is shifting from tangible to intangible assets. Knowledge and relationships are becoming more valuable and prized than the traditional perception of value based on tangible assets. This new standard of measurement is being used not only in assessing an organization's value, but also in assessing an individual's value.

This "new economy" has introduced many exciting elements to the way business is conducted. However, it has also created a huge shortage of "qualified" labor to perform the work. This, in turn, has led to high attrition rates and constant job-hopping for higher salaries, stock options, and better benefits. Because the new economy's foundation is rooted in high technology, one might assume that the labor shortage is limited to those with technical skills and backgrounds. The lack of qualified technical personnel is only part of the problem, however. A bigger concern is the lack of—or perceived lack of—qualified project managers to manage and bring order to the chaos.

Organizations often believe that they have to have someone who is a technical expert with experience in "their" industry because "their" projects are unique and require a certain skill set to complete successfully. If this unique individual is not available, they will often assign their most qualified technical lead or manager to act as the project manager. This type of *laissez faire* approach to identifying and assigning a project manager is often the

"kiss of death" for both the individual and the project.

The one advantage to this type of approach is that the project manager will be capable of knowing whether something on the project is technically incorrect. However, there are numerous disadvantages to this approach. For example, if someone is a technical expert in a certain area, their natural inclination is to focus on the technical aspects of the project. Often, they lose sight of the other elements making up the project. Another hazard to this approach is that while these individuals may work well within their area of specialty, they may not be comfortable working in a team environment, much less managing and leading a team as the project manager. Just because someone is

having to worry about the other elements required to make the project successful. Of course, if you have someone in your organization who has both of these attributes, you should do everything you can to retain them because they are indeed a rare breed.

In my role as President of the PMI®-Georgia Chapter over the past couple of years, I've often been asked by individuals looking to make a career change—as well as by employers looking for qualified project managers—whether project management skills are transferable to different industries and projects. My response is an emphatic "yes." Quite frankly, I know that it can be done because I've done it.

In the course of my career, I've had the opportunity to manage construction, information technology, and consulting projects. Each situation had an initial learning

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the leading expert in their field doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to be an expert at managing projects. This approach can doom the project to failure.

On the other hand, if you have a project manager who is not a technical expert, but who is experienced at managing projects, they will tend to focus on all the elements required to complete the project successfully, not just the technical aspects. By taking this approach, they allow the subject matter experts to focus on their area of expertise and thus relieve them of

curve associated with the organization and the types of projects being performed in that environment. But when all was said and done, each of the projects had a beginning and an end. Each had a schedule and a budget, and some level of quality. Each had changes and risks that occurred and had to be managed. Each was performed by a team, which, in turn, required a detailed communications plan. And finally, each required that all of the various aspects of the project be coordinated and integrated to ensure successful completion. Although the technical aspects of these projects were

indeed very different, the fundamental knowledge and skills required to make them successful remained unchanged.

When I'm asked the question about whether skills are transferable, I like to tell the story of Vince Lombardi, arguably the most successful football coach of all time, winning five world championships in nine seasons. Although Coach Lombardi is known for his success in football, he didn't start his coaching career in the sport. In fact, his first head coaching assignment was as basketball coach for St. Cecilia, a parochial school in New Jersey. Basketball was a sport that he knew little about; regardless, he eventually coached his team to a regional title. His initial success came not from his knowledge and experience about basketball, but rather from his ability to motivate and lead a team toward a common goal.

The same is true with project management skills. You don't have to be an industry expert to successfully manage projects specific to that industry. You do, however, need to be an expert at managing, motivating, and leading a diverse team of individuals toward a common goal. If you can master these attributes, you'll be able to apply them to any type of project in any industry.

So, if you're looking to make a career change (e.g., from construction to IT), don't sell yourself short just because you may not have years and years of experience in a particular industry. Instead, focus on selling your ability to manage and successfully deliver a diverse portfolio of projects. And if you're an employer looking to hire a project manager, don't worry about finding someone who has experience in "your" industry. Consider going outside the box and looking at someone who has experience managing projects successfully in other organizations or industries.

These individuals can bring knowledge, skills, and experience to your organization that will not be possible for someone who has worked only in one industry. They, in turn, may exceed any expectations you had for them and their ability to manage a project.

In the age of the new economy, an individual's ability to manage projects successfully, regardless of

the organization or industry, will become the most valuable and desirable skill set in the marketplace. Project management will, in essence, become a profession without bounds.

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Web Tool Takes a Process-Driven Approach

by Christi Hennessey, staff writer

WelcomHome is one of the few project management software tools to use a process-driven approach encompassing all aspects of project management, according to Daniel Patterson, Product Manager at Welcom.

Welcom, a project management software solutions company, is headquartered in Houston, Texas, with offices in the United Kingdom, France, and Thailand. The company opened in 1983, and employs about 75 people worldwide.

Their web-based tool, WelcomHome (www.welcomhome.net) allows the sharing of information and collaboration among all team members via the web. "WelcomHome is a project management portal," described Patterson. "It can be of benefit to all types of team members—from the project manager, to team members working in remote locations, or even to stakeholders who do not need a detailed view of the project."

The product contains the following features:

- **Project Homepage**—houses all basic information on an individual project (e.g., scope, mission statement, milestones)
- **Notices**—a list of all actions taken on a particular project
- **Data Aware Components**—allows the integration of both schedule information and data from other, external systems
- **Processes**—provides a series of process templates that encourage users to adopt a structured approach to their tasks
- **Collaboration Tool**—a messaging platform that provides for discussion forums
- **Document Viewer**—allows team members to share various project-related documents
- **Open Items**—user-specific list of issues and action items.

WelcomHome users may choose to view their daily to-do lists, by using the "My Open Items" feature. The to-do list shows all outstanding