

The Qualities of a Project Manager

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ABSTRACT

It is becoming more evident that success in the role of a Project Manager cannot be attained with a technical skill set alone. Excellent soft skills are necessary requisites for success. The aim of the paper is to discuss the qualities of a Project Manager in the Statistical Programming environment, how they are applied and why they are important.

INTRODUCTION

Clinical Development has undergone fundamental changes over the past 10 years. With organizations becoming more global, the process of planning, conducting and analyzing clinical trials has gained in complexity and scope which ultimately affects the world of Statistical Programmers in a profound way.

With team members coming from different continents and cultures, projects developing with external partners (biotech, research groups or competitors) and filings in new countries like China, Japan or India, have led to new challenges for programmers who find themselves confronted with a whole new set of required skills. One of them is Project Management.

Most Project Management courses/training concentrate's on the technical aspect for example:

- o Structure
- o Roles
- o Planning
- o Control
- o Resource etc.....

However technical skills alone will not guarantee the success of the project, one of the main risks of any project are the people. Success of the project can be jeopardized by poor communication or lack of commitment to the team. Projects typically do not operate under ideal circumstances. We have to motivate people, are under time pressure and moving towards uncertain conditions with uncertain goals. We need to motivate the people and the team to reach the project deadline; I believe that soft skills are the most important attributes a Project Managers needs because ultimately Project Management is getting work done through people.

Firstly ask yourself the question what makes a good Project Manager? , there are many sub skills we can use to define the role of a Project Manager. The following are the sub skills I think make a good Project Manager and emphasize the soft skills needed to succeed in the role.

- o Communication
- o Leadership
- o Effective teams
- o Decision making
- o Influencing/ Negotiation
- o Planning

No doubt if you asked another Lead Programmer or Project Manager they may come up with a different list of sub skills, what I will talk about in this paper is that you probably have these skills already and the key is recognizing when to use them.

SETTING THE SCENE

Once upon a time, there was a Project Manager. This Project Manager was technical strong, motivated, and driven to succeed. They could create the most amazing Gantt Charts. One day, they took on a new project. This project was large and complex. It involved working across functions and many stakeholders. And the project team was, let's just say, "challenging." But this didn't scare our Project Manager. They created a fabulous Gantt Chart, established milestones, and documented roles and responsibilities. They created cost, time management, and quality management plans. And they delegated out assignments to the project team with a confidence. The project went off track quickly. Team members argued, stakeholders failed to participate, and serious issues emerged. The Project

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Manager requested status updates, set up meetings, and reported to the management team — all things that “good” Project Managers do. But eventually, it all went wrong..... Why? They either didn't have — or didn't use — soft skills that today's, Project Managers absolutely must not only have — but also use.

Firstly what is the definition of Project Management? In its simplest terms it is:

‘Managing a movement from one state to another’

This could mean designing a new building or just the process of moving people and their equipment to a different part of the office. It could also be the implementation of a system or a change to a reporting tool.

Each requires great skill and diplomacy and each is fraught with difficulties. Each project is unique and will throw-up different challenges to the Project Manager, but as long as the Project Manager has a strong set of soft and technical skills they should be able to tackle any project! So let's look at some of these skills that are needed by today's Project Manager's.....

COMMUNICATION

One of the most important skills we must have as a Project Manager is to make sure you communicate, and your team members communicate with each other.

There is an old story that, in the First World War, the front line sent a message via runners to the general. The message said: "Send reinforcements, we are going to advance". By the time the message reached the general it said "send three and four pence, we are going to a dance".

The message sent out as Project Manager can get distorted and misunderstood therefore it is very important to get this right. Ultimately communicating is the achievement of a common understanding between two or more people - i.e.: where both attribute the same meaning to the information that is exchanged.

With current technology and working across cultures it is so important to ensure we are communicating effectively with our teams. It is important therefore that we consider more than just the words we are using when communicating, in the communication model 7% is received by verbal, the remainder is by body language or outside factors. Treat communication as you would any other managed activity:

- o Plan what to tell and ask
- o Outline your objectives and understanding seek constant feedback
- o Use open 5Ws 1H questions (Why, Where, Who, What, When, How)
- o Reflect Use - closed questions for confirmation (you have two ears and one mouth and should use them in that proportion)
- o Summarize agree actions

If you take these factors into account and consider who you are communicating to and the message(s) you want to get across, you will be successful in achieving your aim of being an effective communicator.

LEADERSHIP

Today's Project Managers must have leadership skills in order to effectively perform their roles in the organization. Without this skill it is difficult to lead global teams comprised of individuals with different personal goals/objectives and varied cultural backgrounds.

Leaders have a project vision and know how to align people with their goals. They provide the structure, as well as motivation, to tune team performance and inspire their team to achieve project objectives. A Project Manager who enables teams to work together can deliver results faster, better and more cost effectively.

Leadership consists of:

- o Providing encouragement to individual and the team
- o Mentoring where required – know when to micro manage or ‘deep dive’ into situations to assist.
- o Facilitating others in the pursuit of a common goal or vision.

The Project Manager must create an environment in which members can understand, accept, and execute their responsibilities with confidence regardless of their role within the team.

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There are many styles of Leadership with the major ones being:

- o Authoritarian or autocratic: This style is used when leaders tell their employees what they want done and how they want it accomplished, without getting the advice of their followers.
- o Participative or democratic: This style involves the leader including one or more employees in the decision making process (determining what to do and how to do it). However, the leader maintains the final decision making authority.
- o Delegate or Free Reign: the leader allows the employees to make the decisions. However, the leader is still responsible for the decisions that are made.

As you become experienced in Leading you will develop your own style, but one of the keys to being a successful Leader is recognizing the style needed to best fit the situation you face, there will be times when you need to apply a autocratic approach or there may be scenarios where you can apply a democratic approach. The success criteria is being comfortable in your style but being able to call upon other approaches when needed.

Being able to have the vision to drive a project and team to a successful completion; the foresight and organization to head off problems that can jeopardize the project; taking accountability for all aspects of the project, and presenting the team in the best light or providing them opportunities to do it themselves; are all examples of strong day-to-day leadership that the Project Manager must deliver. Remember the sign of a good leader means the team can still function in your absence!

EFFECTIVE TEAMS

Building a team in the business environment is a challenge. In today's landscape we face the challenges of working across continents and therefore co-location is not easy and rarely occurs. More frequently a project team is made up of borrowed resources from other functional areas within the organization and usually also has vendors and suppliers.

Creating a team atmosphere where the team believes that "we are all in this together" is a critical component to project success.

In 1965, Bruce Tuckman developed a simple four-stage model of team development that has become an accepted part of thinking about how teams develop. In his article, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," Tuckman outlines four stages of team development: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. A successful team knows which stage they are in, and manages transitions between the different stages adeptly.

The Forming stage involves the introduction of team members, either at the initiation of the team, or as members are introduced subsequently. Members are likely to be influenced by the expectations and desires they bring with them, and will be keen to understand how the group will operate. In particular, they will be keen to understand how the leadership is likely to operate, in terms of style and character. This is a stage of transition from a group of individuals to a team.

As team members grow more confident, the team is likely to enter the Storming phase. Team members will have different opinions as to how the team should operate. The best teams will understand the conflict, actively listen to each other, and navigate an agreed way forwards. Other teams may disintegrate as they bolster their own opinions to weather the storms of the group.

As the teams emerge with an agreed method of operating, the team enters the Norming phase. Team members have signed upto a common working method, and everyone is usually willing to share in this. During this phase, team members are able to reconcile their own opinions with the greater needs of the team. Co-operation and collaboration replace the conflict and mistrust of the previous phase.

Finally the team reaches the final phase, Performing. The emphasis is now on reaching the team goals, rather than working on team process. Relationships are settled, and team members are likely to build loyalty towards each other. The team is able to manage more complex tasks, and cope with greater change. The performing stage can either lead onto:

- o a return to the forming stage as group membership changes,
- o a new "dorming" stage as the group gets complacent or
- o "adjourning" as the group successfully reaches its goal and completes its work.

Characteristics of an effective team can be defined as:

- o There is a clear unity of purpose - the objectives are meaningful to each group member.
- o The group is self-conscious about its own operations. The group has taken time to explicitly discuss the team process -- how the group will function to achieve its objectives. The group has a clear, explicit, and mutually agreed-upon approach: expectations, rules, etc.

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- o The group has set clear and demanding performance goals for itself.
- o The atmosphere tends to be informal, comfortable, relaxed. A working atmosphere in which people are involved and interested.
- o Discussion in which virtually everyone participates. The members listen to each other. Every idea is given a hearing. People are not afraid of being foolish by putting forth a creative thought even if it seems extreme.
- o People are free in expressing their feelings as well as their ideas.
- o There is disagreement and this is viewed as good. The reasons are carefully examined, and the group seeks to resolve them rather than disregard.
- o Each individual carries his or her own weight, each individual is respectful of the mechanics of the group: arriving on time, coming to meetings prepared, completing agreed upon tasks on time, etc. When action is taken, clear assignments are made (who-what-when) and willingly accepted and completed by each group member.

Team building is a vital activity to be undertaken by a Project Manager during a project. Team building should start early in the life of the project. It is the forming of project team into a cohesive group working for the best interest of the project and the organization in order to enhance performance. It is the job of the Project Manager to guide, manage and improve the interaction of team members.

DECISION MAKING

As a Project Manager you make hundreds of decisions each day. This starts with how many times you decide to hit the snooze alarm before getting out of bed. It continues throughout the day, from how to respond to each email you receive. Each of these decisions will help to define the path of your project. The tricky part is keeping your project on the right path. There are many decision making models that can be applied to a given problem:

- o Decision Trees,
- o 6 thinking hats,
- o Grid Analysis
- o Fish Bone Analysis etc

These will help us make decisions with the available information, look at the consequences of decisions, the importance of individual factors and come to the best course of action to take. Sometimes the decision(s) made will not always be popular and it is the role of the Project Manager to ensure the team buys into the decision – other skill sets will be called upon to ensure this happens. For example being able to influence and negotiate people is vital to ensure that the common goal is understood.

Another area in decision making is learning from the past. There is nothing worse than a Project Manager making the same decisions each time, we can learn from previous situations to ensure we are always improving and striving for a better way to tackle the issue.

Remember though that tools/ methods only assist our intelligence and common sense! The tools/ methods should only assist in the decision making and support your gut instinct. One of the key things as Project Manager though is that once the decision has been made the important task is to communicate this to the whole team.

INFLUENCING/ NEGOTIATION

NEGOTIATION

The negotiation starts at every stage of the project right from the beginning. Negotiation skills are essential as the Project Manager needs to negotiate various aspects like:

- o Scope of the project,
- o Deadlines,
- o Resource,
- o Team structure that is needed to deliver the project,
- o Milestones and many other things that happen through out the project

Negotiation takes place when two people (or more), with differing views, come together to attempt to reach agreement on some issue. It is a form of communication known as persuasive communication. In a word, bargaining.

There are some key rules when negotiating:

- o Aim for the best deal. You can always trade down but it is more difficult to trade up.
- o Get the other person's want list
- o Do not underestimate the complexity of negotiating.

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- o Remain flexible.

Negotiation is a social skill. Ultimately the only way to refine your technique is to do it, note what happens, and do it again and again. Practice makes perfect!

INFLUENCING

Influencing skills go hand in hand with negotiation skills. Influencing is convincing the other party on the choice that Project Manager thinks is better than the other. Influencing requires an understanding of the formal and informal structure of all organization involved in the project.

For example getting one of the team to work late to meet a deadline when they would prefer to go to the pub and in turn they can leave early the following week is an example of using these skills.

There are many styles that can be applied when influencing people:

- o Natural: Most people have a natural way to influence which they prefer to use whenever possible. Remember the more styles of influencing you have the likelihood of greater success
- o Logical: Use clear, logical, unassailable arguments supported by proof.
- o Autocratic: You tell them, they agree!
- o Collaborative: Include others in the decision making process.
- o Emotional: Use your natural charm, charisma or enthusiasm
- o Assertive: Ask directly, clearly and confidently for what you want or don't want
- o Passive: by being submissive, but not overtly influencing
- o Bargaining: Trade concessions in order to reach mutually acceptable conclusion
- o Flexible: Having a range of approaches and styles of behavior gives you more flexibility. It increases your options and therefore your chances of success.

You will have a style that you are most comfortable with, use this as your primary approach when trying to influence others. The key is to recognize when an alternative approach may be needed and applying that style to the situation. There is no right way or single approach to influencing people, influencing other people is often more about changing your attitudes and behavior than it is about changing theirs. Spending time thinking about your own approach and the interpersonal, presentation, communication and assertiveness skills you possess can help you to be more effective in influencing others and getting ultimately what you want.

PLANNING

Project Managers must work within tight schedules, manage resources across the organization and deliver results on time and within budget. Planning therefore is one of the most important activity Project Managers should engage in to achieve these goals.

A detailed, systematic, team-involved plan will aid the success of the project. Without it, risks become greater, time is spent poorly, money is spent unwisely and projects go off track. When planning for a project (no matter how small) it is important to ensure that the various stages and activities of the project are planned. Most projects come in late - that's just the way it is - so don't plan a timescale that is over-ambitious. Ideally plan for some slippage (allow for contingency planning). If you have been given a fixed deadline, plan to meet it earlier, and work back from that earlier date.

Another important part of the planning stage is picking your team. Take great care, especially if you have team-members imposed on you by the project brief. Selecting and gaining commitment from the best team members - whether directly employed, contractors, or other partners - is crucial to the quality of the project, and the ease with which you are able to manage it. Generally try to establish your team as soon as possible.

To plan and manage large complex projects with various parallel and dependent activities you will need to put together a Project Plan. Your Project Plan will show you the order in which tasks must be performed, and the relative importance of tasks. Some tasks can appear small and insignificant when they might actually be hugely influential in enabling much bigger activities to proceed or give best results. A Gantt chart is a useful way of showing blocks of activities over time and at a given cost and for managing the project and its costs along the way.

There are various project management software available (Micro Soft Project), it is important not to get bogged down in the detail of this plan though – it will not manage the project for you! Before trying creating a plan though you should understand and concentrate on developing the pure project management skills. The best software in the world will not help you if you can't do the key things.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, Project Managers are unique and multi skilled, in that they should be able to function in almost any

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environments. It is the discipline of planning, people management, organizing, and managing resources to bring about the successful completion of specific project goals and objectives. It is not one skill but a set of 'soft' and 'technical' skills we use in our everyday role. The skill is recognizing which one to use and when.

In our role within the Pharmaceutical Industry we have to deal with bigger more complex projects with a number of factors that impact the tasks (time zones, resource, shifting priorities, cultural difference etc). We have to recognize the skills that are required and call upon them when needed, the tools we have available will only provide structure and framework. These however are not a substitute for creativity; each project we work on is unique; involving uncertainty and risk requiring flexibility to meet the demands. This paper will have touched upon the skills needed to be a successful Project Manager and no doubt many more could be defined and discussed; the key is applying the right skills in the right situation and practice. Depending on your responsibilities, the degree of Project Management skills you require may vary, but whatever level every SAS programmer in the Pharmaceutical Industry needs to be able to Project Manage!

REFERENCES

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