Where Do We Find Project Managers?
Internal Expertise May Lead to Better Implementation

Discussions on project management can pop up in the strangest and most unlikely situations. In a typical mid-December occurrence, I found myself at a gathering of family and assorted business associates of the party host. With glass of Merlot in hand, I wandered among the crowd looking for interesting conversation. Heading for a refill, I bumped into my wife who was chatting with a young woman about event management. It seems that the woman (who was an event organizer by profession) was continually perplexed by the typical problems that we all face in managing projects. Keeping control of the workscope and meeting time commitments headed the list.

I was pleasantly surprised by her interest in what I had to offer in the way of advice on project management. Putting down her drink, she busily drew diagrams on cocktail napkins as I rambled on about such mundane things as work breakdown structures, project milestone schedules and the like.

Eventually, her fiancé joined the discussion, with even greater interest in project management. His company was engaged in projects associated with computer software solutions for the public safety industry. Projects could involve the installation of computer-aided dispatch systems for police, fire and ambulance operations, as well as the development of advanced technology for such systems.

His company was experiencing difficulty in finding qualified project managers, as well as a qualified leader of the project management function. We met again in early January, to discuss this topic with several principles of the firm. Preparing for that session, I jotted down some notes on sources of project management qualified personnel.

Types of PM Personnel

- ❑ Technically-competent Project Managers
- ❑ Project Administrators
- ❑ Directors of PM (CPO)

In general, we can place PM qualified people into one of three groups. The first tend to be highly qualified in their technical area, while possessing some competence in the area of project management. The second generally have a passing knowledge of the technical discipline, but their primary expertise is in the area of project planning, coordination and control. The third category calls for the ability to lead the project management function, including the development and implementation of the project management capability, the acquisition and development of skilled project management personnel, and the management of the project management portfolio.

PM Functions

- ❑ Manage Projects
- ❑ Project Administration & Control
- ❑ Develop PM Standards & Practices
- ❑ Train & Mentor

In describing the types of project management personnel, we also define the functions of such people. It is important to specify just what skills are needed. Clarifying the project management functions is a prerequisite to identifying the needed skills. Each function calls for strengths in different areas. It is rare to find people with all of the above skills, or with an interest in all of these functional areas.

Types of Organizations

- ❑ Project (dedicated resources)
- ❑ Matrix (shared resources)
- ❑ Team (temporary project assignments)
- ❑ Mixed (blend of Project, Matrix, Full Time Team, Part Time Team)

The selection criteria for people to execute the defined functions may also depend on how you are organized for project management. Here we are concerned with culture as well as skills. Some people work better in a formally defined organization, such as a project structure. Others may flourish in a matrix or team environment.

Source of Qualified Personnel

- ❑ PMP's (Project Management Professionals (PMI certified)
- ❑ Certificate Holders (Series of PM courses at schools)
- ❑ On-the-Job Trained
- ❑ Mentored

With the popularity of the Project Management Institute's PMP program, this is an obvious choice for sourcing qualified project management personnel. The knowledge required to gain certification is generally greater than is required for certificate programs. However, there are a few caveats to note. First, PMP certification is an indication of knowledge about project management topics. It says nothing about that person's knowledge and skills in the application area. If the PMP holder has not had working experience in the technical area involved, that person's value may be limited to project administration and control, working in support of a technical manager.

Second, validation of knowledge in project management, as signified by the PMP designation, does not guarantee skills in actually managing projects and the people and communication skills involved. On the other hand, a person coming out of a technical

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background, who has earned the PMP in order to enhance his or her project management skills, can offer a potent capability.

An alternative, for people already involved on the job, is to take a series of courses on project management topics. Many schools have set up a curriculum of required and elective courses, leading to a certificate in project management. I will mention one reservation here. In my experience in delivering some of these courses, I have found that a few of the attendees were not serious about gaining the knowledge, rather being solely interested in having the certificate. These programs generally do not test and validate what knowledge the student retained. The hiring agent will have to do the validation.

Often called "the accidental profession", many project management qualified people have learned their skills on the job, Forty years ago, when I started out in project management, there weren't any project management courses. Eventually, those of us who developed project management skills started presenting in-house courses to others. Later, several PMI chapters sponsored project management seminars. There is a vast cadre of self-trained project management practitioners. They are likely to be highly qualified. The thing to watch for here is to be sure that they are up-to-date on the newer practices and project management technology and tools.

A variation on the OTJ training theme is mentoring. This involves using an internal expert or an external consultant to guide the fledgling project management person through the project management functions to be performed. The intent is to bring that person up to speed as soon as possible while eventually getting that person to fly solo. An advantage is that the training is directly associated with the firm's applications and project management practices.

A Model Scenario

- ❑ Select current hire (exhibits interest and aptitude for PM)
- ❑ Assign responsibility for PM
- ❑ Require acquisition of PM credentials
- ❑ Provide guidance via senior personnel or mentor

Here is one of the solutions to obtaining project management qualified personnel that I find to be effective and efficient. It involves using people that are already known to the firm and have been found to be competent in their technical area and have shown an interest in project management. I would assign them extended project management responsibility, on the condition that they acquire the required skills, via formal training (PMP, PM Certificate, etc.) While they are in this maturation phase, they should have access to a qualified project management expert. The mentor should keep an eye on the "rookie" until satisfied the he or she can do the job.

Advantages

❑ You know the person (skills, aptitude, performance, reliability)
❑ Person knows the organization and the business

Disadvantages

❑ Needs to learn PM skills
❑ Must provide assistance during "start-up"

Final Points

This model scenario is obviously just one of many sourcing options. In general, it has the least risk. Getting up to speed is usually an issue in expanding project management personnel. Developing internal expertise may not always be the fastest, but is likely to eventually lead to a better implementation.

In an emergency, outsourcing may be a necessary alternative. For senior people, such as the Chief Project Officer, you may have to use a search firm. Again, if you can find and develop people from within the organization, you lower the risk.

Harvey A. Levine, with 38 years of service to the project management industry, is founder of **The Project Knowledge Group**, a consulting firm specializing in PM training, PM software selection, evaluation & implementation, and PM using microcomputers.

He has implemented or enhanced the project management capabilities of numerous firms, often combined with the selection or implementation of computerized project management tools. Mr. Levine is considered the leading consultant to the project management software industry and is recognized as the leading expert in tools for project management.

He has been an Adjunct Professor of Project Management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Boston University. And has conducted numerous project management public seminars for ASCE, AMA, IBM, and PMI.

Mr. Levine is the author of the book "Project Management using Microcomputers", and has been published extensively in other books, periodicals and videos.

Mr. Levine is a past president of the Project Management Institute and the recipient of *PMI's 1989 Distinguished Contribution to Project Management* award. Recently, he was recently elected as a *Fellow of PMI*.

Mr. Levine has offices in Saratoga Springs, NY and San Diego, CA and can be contacted via e-mail at: LevineHarv@cs.com