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# Are Your PM Skills Evolving?

 Wednesday, 02 March 2011 01:53 |  |  | 

by Jonathan Weinstein, PMP

The growing prominence of project management as a discipline and career path has led to the emergence of several new skills that federal project managers increasingly need to be successful. The current pace of change, volume of information, crisis-driven environment, emphasis on transparency and accountability, and increased prominence on project management require the development of skills not traditionally associated with the discipline.

## Messaging and Context

The ability to distill, organize, receive, and deliver information extends beyond traditional project communication skills. Effective messaging and context require project communications from each stakeholder's perspective, translating concepts and jargon across the multidisciplinary personnel who make up today's project teams. This skill is about telling the story in a way that is relevant and compelling to the audience.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has turned structured "story telling" into an effective part of improving project performance across the organization. Masters' forums, lessons-learned events, and other "campfire" activities for the project management community enable project teams to reflect constructively on "How are we doing?" and "Where are we going?" The project manager draws on specific recent or historical examples to create a relevant metaphor for the project team and stakeholders.

## Integration

The growing diversity and complexity of projects and project teams calls for managers to have the ability to integrate unconnected systems—not IT systems, but people, processes, information, and technology. For the project manager, this is akin to leading a symphony, integrating the sweeping sections and balancing the delicate solos to deliver a harmonious result. The General Services Administration's Public Buildings Service (PBS), for example, sees the evolution of the project manager role into one of an integrator. PBS project managers must integrate all the disciplines involved in building development—design, construction, contracting, personnel, safety, environmental, financial, political, regulatory, marketing, and more—to create a masterpiece, a facility that will endure the pressures of time, weather, and aesthetics.

## Facilitation

Beyond managing effective meetings, project managers must have the ability to lead groups of people (e.g., teams, stakeholders, the public). At any time during a project, the project manager may need to conduct structured, facilitated sessions to address issues, solicit key stakeholders input, or complete deliverables.

Designing, delivering, and documenting facilitated sessions involves more than drafting an agenda and distributing meeting minutes. Successful facilitators prepare scripts that describe the specific activities and outcomes needed to reach a final result. While conducting a session, the facilitator must have the ability to adjust to the activity or process to produce a useful outcome. Effective facilitated sessions will yield more solid and sustainable results, engage stakeholders, and make efficient use of time and resources.

## Curiosity and Imagination

Skills such as "thinking outside the box" and defining and solving problems are becoming more and more critical for project managers. By seeking to understand why a problem has occurred and developing alternative solutions, project managers will be able to look beyond specific barriers, anticipate potential problems, and make recommendations for correcting systemic issues.

Project managers at the Government Accountability Office are responsible for leading their teams in

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efforts to understand issues affecting the programs they analyze. This effort requires critical listening and analytical skills, as well as the ability to think beyond traditional causes in formulating recommendations to address identified problems. Project managers in scientifically-oriented organizations, such as NASA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, thrive in an environment that encourages curiosity and imagination.

The emergence of new skills that integrate with traditional skills will place increasing demands on federal project managers to adjust and adapt to new project environments. Acquiring and honing these skills will differentiate successful project managers and projects throughout the federal government.

Adapted from *Achieving Project Management Success in the Federal Government* (Management Concepts, 2010).

#### ***About the Editors***

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ISSN 2154-7866  
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