

Secrets of the intuitive Project Manager (and how today's technology can leverage his/her capabilities)

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Quick – think of who's the best project manager you've ever known, the one person you'd trust with your most daunting project challenge, your most demanding client. If you're like me, someone comes to mind immediately – that one person who seems to stand out above the crowd, who consistently delivers quality projects on time and on budget, and always seems to have satisfied clients.

Have you ever thought about how they consistently produce positive results? Is it weeks and weeks of project management training? Using the most sophisticated software? While they may have these resources, chances are the amount of training or software isn't their secret – what sets them apart is usually their good interpersonal communications skills and the respect of their fellow workers. They're the type of person who leads by example, who commands the respect and loyalty of those around him or her regardless of the position they hold in the company hierarchy. They're what we call an *intuitive project manager*, that person who just seems to know how to rally his or her staff, keep them on track and guide, rather than micro-manage, the entire project team to success. Plus they've delivered the goods so many times that their bosses trust them implicitly and don't feel the need for a lot of "oversight".

Somehow, they know how to get results from people, regardless of (and often in spite of) the company's "official" project management system or tools. After all, they were delivering results long before the company instituted that

new project management system, and before sophisticated computer tools were widely available.

Intuitive project managers can rarely explain how they achieve their results, partly because what they do may actually fly in the face of official policies and project management dictates (such as "Thou shall update thine work plan monthly"; "Thou shall update thine hourly staff utilization projections weekly"). So how do they do it? Simple:

- They effectively communicate with the people to whom they've delegated tasks, making sure everyone understands how their assignments affect others on the team, the successful outcome of the project, and the business goals of the organization;
- They trust their staff to manage their own workflow, and engage the people actually responsible for delivering results in developing a realistic work plan at the very outset of the project;
- They trust the people to whom they delegate; once they obtain an individual's commitment to produce a deliverable under an agreed upon timeline, budget, and level of quality, all they ask is that the individual notify him or her immediately if something changes that could affect their commitments;
- They communicate regularly with the next level of managers below them, and expect those managers to similarly communicate with the layer below them.

In smaller organizations such as a startup company, this type of team trust and commitment is easily obtained; everyone works in close proximity to each other and understands the big picture. As organizations grow, corporate hierarchies and matrix management systems make the job of the project manager more challenging.

Historically, the need for senior management to have a single source of information on a project has necessitated the appointment of a project manager to plan and gather progress status. This has led to the “centralized command and control” approach to project management and the evolution of portfolio project management and business project management software tools to aid the project manager in gathering the needed information.

Despite all of the current supporting tools, which have become increasingly complex, cumbersome and more expensive, project managers find themselves swamped with the effort to produce their monthly status reports and their weekly staff utilization projections, etc.

In the 1990s, as communications technology changed and project teams became separated by departments and disperse locations, tools like the telephone, fax machine, and emails became the dominant form of communication used to manage project teams.

As early as 1993, when the U.S. business community was finally recovering from the “bust” of the late 1980s, downsizing had forced many of the still-employed survivors to wear more than one hat, and organizations attempted to become less centralized and more efficient by flattening the hierarchy – requiring an even higher level and quality of

communications than ever. In fact, the need for an entirely new approach to managing projects was recognized at that time, one based on more effective and timely intra-team communication and collaboration, rather than on the old concept and tools employed in the “central command and control” management approach ([*“Market demands new project management strategies”*](#), Pittsburgh Business Times, February 8 – 14, 1993, by Stan Polsky). This methodology was basically a formalization of the “intuitive project manager” approach that focuses on communications and trust to empower the individuals responsible for delivering specific results to become part of the management structure – a “distributed management” approach.

New software designed to enable more effective project communications by the “intuitive project manager” became available in the early 1990s ([*“Company Info must flow freely to all”*](#), Pittsburgh Business Times, May 29, 1995, by Stan Polsky). However, communication technology limitations at the time made it difficult to implement this methodology company-wide; this was before broadband access to the Internet became readily available to all.

Today, one can use Web 2.0 applications like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and many other social networking sites to establish instant communications with any number of individuals or groups around the world. Communications technology has advanced to the point that instant messaging and the transfer of valuable information is no longer limited by access to a computer, but can be “pushed” to cell phones on demand. There is no longer any reason that project information can’t be instantly conveyed

to disparate project team members, as well as to senior managers.

The only obstacle to improving intra-team communications is one thing: the reliance on the central command and control approach to project management, wherein one person must be the sole owner of all project-related information – which is the framework around which (until now) virtually all project management, portfolio project management, and business process management software tools were based. Instead of changing the methodology behind current project management tools, software companies continue adding more and more “new features” to an outdated methodology aimed at improving collaboration, making the software more complex, more cumbersome, and more expensive.

SynapMod[®] is a unique Internet software service that was built around the new Network Centric ManagementSM approach to improving project communications, allowing bottom-up input from those responsible for delivering results at any level of an organization. Color-coded, personalized dashboards are available to all team members with a need to collaborate with others working on interdependent tasks. In fact, these interdependent team members become part of a structured communication network in which instant communications among nodes in the network, at any level of management, can empower staff to collaborate and resolve issues at their level.

Senior managers also receive the benefit of personalized dashboards, in which they can easily access status updates for any and all projects and strategic activities – in real time, pushed to their cell phone if desired. The

dashboard acts as an early alert system in which a quick scan of the dashboard indicators tells them which projects or activities may be in trouble, and allows them to easily drill down to any level of input and hone in on issues requiring quick management support to ward off looming crises.

With the current revolution in personal communication through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, think of the enabling power of a structured communication network and how it could completely change the way senior management and project teams communicate and manage workflow. It would no longer matter what functional department you’re in, whether you’re a “horizontal” team member in a remote field location or a headquarters-based manager of a “vertical” business process like procurement - you could have full visibility of the status of all project-related events that may have an impact on you being able to meet your commitments. In addition, senior management would have full visibility of the current status of all project-related events, freeing up the project manager to actually manage the work being done and to address the disruptions that inevitably occur during the course of implementation.

This distributed management methodology we now call Network Centric Management can be easily implemented to help improve the productivity and business-to-business capabilities of any organization, from the prime integrator of a complex, global manufacturing supply chain to a virtual team designing a new building. If you’re having problems getting the information you need when you need it, it’s worth investigating this new type of project communications and management software!