



Project Managers - How to Recognize Three Types Who Will Slow You Down.



Every successful product development program requires a "champion", and a motivated, tech savvy PM. They can be, but usually are not the same person. The former is the visionary program leader and critical to the

team. The second, is the contact we will work with on a weekly basis, and the one who moves that vision from a wish into reality. For starters, if a project has a hope of succeeding, those two people have to be on the personnel list.

The primary objective of the PM is to guide our efforts, answer our questions, insulate us from the politics and bureaucracy of their company, and accurately communicate our counsel to their internal decision makers. "We are only as good as our customers' PM" is a truism. Their qualifications and experience are considered carefully during our proposal process.

Project Managers, for the most part, do their job effectively. Some are better than others. If we are fortunate enough to work with a talent, work progresses smoothly, and everybody is happy. Generally, we are comfortable with PMs who are referrals or return customers since we have an idea what to expect. If they are a new customer, there are three types of PMs we try to avoid.

Project Managers come to us with the best of intentions, but one particularly unsettling type has responsibility, but no authority. They are not uncommon, but unfortunately hard to identify until we are well into the development process. The way we develop projects affords us the ability to respond to PM suggestions and satisfy their astute out-of-scope activity requests – it is one of the reasons we work for time and materials.

Problems arise when the PM asks us to proceed without knowing if their expanded budget will be approved. It is not a stretch to

say these types may not even know they don't have authority to request extra funds until they are challenged. When we do ask for P.O. extension, and it's denied, they fear reprisal from their management and don't step-up and ask for the extra funds. It really slows . . . things . . . down.

Another untoward situation is when a corporate directive has divided the subsystems development responsibilities of a project among many managers. It is a common practice. Problems surface when it is not clear whose budget will be used to pay for our work. An example is the design and fabrication of a cable harness, where one PM is responsible for the design, and another for the fabrication. When it is time to assess charges, a job well done can be eclipsed by a turf battle.

Only recently we discovered that some with the title "Project Manager" are not technical people at all. They are purchasing agents with a functional role to monitor budget and schedules. Yes, budget and schedules are important, but those whose expertise is mostly focused on arbitrary deadlines and Gantt charts are not good project managers. We experienced this during two recent large-scale programs where we never saw one of the active "PMs", and only heard from the other when his bonus program was affected. It didn't end well, and taught us to be suspicious of business card titles.

Before a project begins we recognize that the Omnicor/PM relationship is based on mutual trust and expectation. We depend on them to effectively oversee the project and make wise decisions, quickly. It's our job to move the development program through to a successful conclusion and make them look good. Seasoned and experienced PMs are invaluable, and when we are working with one who knows his or her stuff, the results can be very rewarding.

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