

A tale of two disciplines

Client-side project managers offer different skills to those on the delivery side, says **ALISTAIR GODBOLD**. Here is how to make the most from both types

There are many different 'types' of project manager – they all have the same core skills, but emphasise different aspects to suit their roles. One of these key types is the client project manager, who acts for the client – as opposed to a project manager who provides hands-on delivery.

The traditional focus of project management literature, bodies of knowledge and competency frameworks has described hands-on delivery, leaving client project managers to fit in where they can. This lack of clarity about the competencies and responsibilities of a client project manager results in projects not delivering benefits, frustrated deliverers and sponsors, widespread angst and re-work.

Client project managers both deliver projects and employ others to do so. This requires a different emphasis on separate competencies to discharge their various responsibilities. This article describes these two types, how they relate, some of the common problems with the relationships, their responsibilities and what the difference in competencies are.

From the perspective of the client, the supply chain will deliver the core scope, such as an IT system, civil structure, testing of a new drug or bringing a new product to market. Supply-chain delivery project managers may manage many different suppliers at various levels.

The client project manager may deliver the desired outcome in a range of ways, including: buying a turnkey solution and managing the internal groups and users to integrate the project into the organisation; managing the supply of client goods and services to be integrated by the supply chain into the final product; and managing other internal or external projects that allow the overall project goals to be realised.

The client project manager acts as the interface for the project into the organisation, managing the commercial relationship, reporting and providing any clarification needed. This interface to the supply chain will usually be through the delivery project manager.

There will be other relationships that develop as the project progresses. The sponsor may have a relationship with the senior director within the delivery organisation, which may also work as an escalation route; or the

users may have relationships with the people conducting the work (for example, designing, building and testing), either as part of the team or for providing clarifications.

The characteristics of client project managers that make them different from delivery project managers are that they focus on areas more aligned with those of a sponsor and programme manager, taking a more strategic, benefits and outcome view.

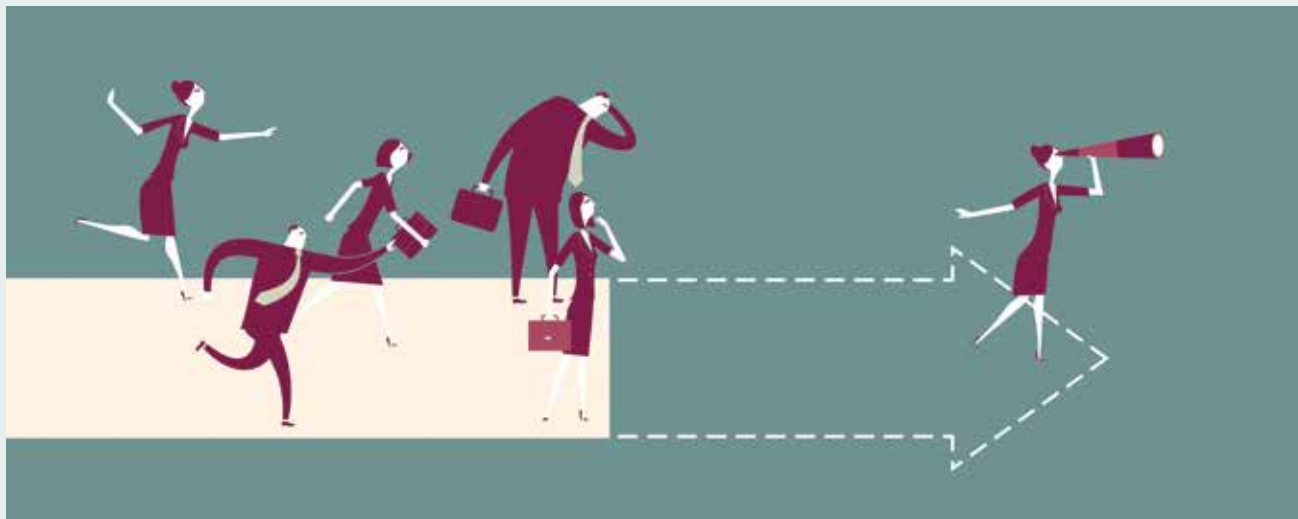
PROBLEMS

There are a number of common problems that beset the relationship between the client and the delivery project manager, and these exist whether they are managing the delivery of a multi-billion pound capital asset or a small IT project.

Common issues include:

- The assumption by the deliverer that the client is a homogenous organisation. There will be different factions – for example, operator, maintainer, different types of user and sponsor. On occasion, the client project managers may not be able to align these views and develop a single voice.
 - The values of the two organisations may not be compatible. This may generate a lack of trust, conflict or misunderstanding.
 - The goals of the two organisations are not clear or aligned, driving people to achieve different or even conflicting objectives.
 - The client project manager has the technical skills but lacks the experience, gravitas or credibility within the client organisation to manage the project.
 - When under pressure, the client project manager reverts to his or her previous role and exhibits the behaviours of a delivery project manager.
 - The contract is not well managed, allowing overspends, delays and unwanted surprises.
 - The contract is badly drafted and does not drive the right behaviours.
 - There is no clear segregation of duties between the client and delivery project managers, causing conflict where things are managed twice, or gaps where each assumes it is the other's responsibility.
- To deliver success, client project managers have a number of essential activities and responsibilities.

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To ensure a successful project, they should:

- Ensure that the values of the delivery organisation and project are aligned with the client. Quite often they will work as an integrated team in some, if not all, of the activities.
- Have the appropriate authority within the client organisation and the full support of the sponsor.
- Maintain the link from the project to the strategy and the outcomes of the organisation.
- Lead the relationship with the delivery organisation by example, especially when the going gets tough.
- Create an environment for success, setting the tone for the project and establishing that the client is committed to success, while acknowledging and dealing with issues.
- Manage how the client organisation interfaces with the deliverer. Control this to ensure a consistent message and prevent problems and unnecessary changes.
- Conduct internal reporting to the sponsor/other stakeholders.
- Respond to questions of clarification and change as the focal point for the organisation, ensuring a consistent message.
- Maintain the commercial contract with the deliverer, monitoring the achievement of milestones.

The competencies needed for the delivery and client project managers are very similar. However, client project managers need to have a more strategic outlook and higher levels of competence in commercial, leadership, communications, assurance, ethics and professional skills. On top of these classical project management competencies, they also need experience, gravitas and credibility within the client organisation.

Good delivery project managers do not necessarily make good client project managers – and vice versa. Client project managers play a vital part in the delivery of projects, with distinct responsibilities and competencies. Successful delivery depends on being clear in what you look for in your client project managers, their responsibilities and their competencies. **■**



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CLIENT PROJECT MANAGERS

Managing the strategic context to ensure that the assumptions, basis and company strategy on which the project was approved remain valid

Managing the environment of the client organisation to ensure they have the appropriate interactions with the deliverer and each other. They will also ensure that the sponsor continues to be effective and has the right interactions

Making sure the organisation and sponsor are kept informed of progress, that the project remains visible and that there are no surprises

Ensuring the benefits of the project are realised by putting in place the correct mechanisms and accountabilities

Driving the client organisation's business case, financial governance and approvals for the delivery of the project

Managing the commercial arrangements with the deliverer in line with the terms of the contract

Conducting or commissioning assurance of delivery to give confidence that the project is being managed in-line with good industry practice and that the outcomes and benefits will be realised

Ensuring that the right information and equipment is supplied to the deliverer in-line with the contract and that questions are responded to in a controlled and timely way

DELIVERY PROJECT MANAGERS

Managing delivery to the contract. Making proposals to the delivery project manager when added value can be created or when assumptions turn out to be invalid

Managing the environment of the delivery organisation so the sub-contractors can deliver and the interactions with the client are controlled and positive

Regularly reporting on progress, the status of risks and issues and when information, decisions or support are needed from the client

Delivering the capabilities of the project as set out in the requirements

Driving the delivery organisation governance processes and preparing the information needed to input to the client governance processes

Managing the commercial arrangements with the client in line with the terms of the contract, and with those of the sub contractors

Conducting or commissioning assurance to give confidence that the project is being managed in line with the contract and will deliver outputs at the agreed cost

Requesting and receiving information and equipment in-line with the contract and ensuring that questions are co-ordinated and tracked