Co-ordinating Project Management Initiatives across the Organisation

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Companies that are progressing down the path of becoming project based often find they need to co-ordinate their efforts across divisions or departments in order to achieve the real business benefits of effective project management. Typically there is a need for co-ordination at three levels of the organisation – company executives or senior functional managers, project or programme managers, and project support personnel.

The executives, or senior functional managers, will form into a Steering Group with the primary role of providing vision and direction on project management initiatives and changing organisational policies to support this vision. The project managers will form into a PM council, and their primary role is sharing best practices and driving changes to the project management methodology. And finally, project support personnel will form into a PM process and support group, and be primarily responsible for co-ordinating usage of project management tools, metrics, and processes across the divisions.

The role and responsibility of each of these groups is further outlined below.

Three Levels of Co-ordination Are Required to Achieve Project Management Excellence

Co-ordination Group	Membership	Role and Responsibility
Project (or Programme) Management Steering Group	Company executives or senior functional managers	- Create or change policies enabling project management (i.e. project management office, career paths, incentives, etc.) - Determine budgets for project management improvement initiatives - Co-ordinate shared resources if appropriate - Share information on strategic direction in division/department and impact it will have on project management - Establish project performance goals and metrics (profitability, ontime project, etc.)
Project (or Programme) Management Council	Project (or Programme) Managers	- Share best practices (tools, templates, methodologies, etc.) - Share information on specific projects, customers, and subcontractors - Evaluate and accept changes to project management processes - Co-ordinate shared resources if appropriate - Prioritise project management improvement efforts for Steering Group
Project Management Processes and Support	Project support personnel (possibly from a PMO)	- Co-ordinate methods for communicating project management standard processes and tools across the company (intranet, newsletters, etc.) - Share information on methods for gathering and tracking project performance data (metrics, process utilisation data, etc.) - Share methods for gathering feedback from project personnel on processes and tools – likes and dislikes, needs, etc. - Co-ordinate requests and requirements for new project management tools

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Of the three groups listed above, companies will typically start with either a Steering Group or a Project Management Council. Both are very important, but since the Steering Group can be a key factor in project management becoming formalised across the organisation, it is worth elaborating some lessons learned in forming a successful Steering Group.

Forming a Steering Group: The Do's and Don'ts

Do locate an executive sponsor – In speaking with companies that have implemented a project management steering group, you may find them jokingly telling you that 7 of the 10 top lessons learned are the need for executive support. The steering group must have an executive sponsor if they are going to be able to make significant policy changes in the organisation.

Do use the existing infrastructure of leadership teams – Most companies already have crossdivisional or multifunctional leadership teams in place. There may be an existing leadership team that is willing to either take on new responsibility or sponsor a new team.

Do establish performance metrics – At some point the executive sponsor is going to turn around and ask the steering group for performance metrics. Ideally the steering group will be able to answer the question: "What is the financial return on investment of implementing project management?" However, if that information is not available, plan on tracking, at a minimum, simpler metrics such as number of projects using new project management processes and tools, or number of people trained.

Do choose a "believer" as the head of the steering group – Do not pick a person who wishes project management would just go away as the head of the steering group. Ideally the steering group leader would also have the scope of control to be able to ensure attendance at the steering group meetings and that people are completing their action items.

Do have periodic face-to-face meetings – Often people on these steering groups are geographically very dispersed. The larger the company, the higher the probability this group of people will be located at different points of the globe. Steering group meetings should be no more than every month or every two months, the majority of which will be telecon or videocon based. However, face-to-face meetings should be planned at least twice a year.

Do keep in close contact with project managers (or the project management council) – The people practising project management will always have the best perspective on barriers to implementing project management effectively. The project managers, and the projects they represent, are the steering group's primary customers.

Do have a clear charter – The primary function of the steering group is to remove barriers for the project managers and to help project management become a standard practice within the company. Ideally their role, responsibility and authority limits will have been clearly defined.

Do adhere to the standard rules for effective teams – The steering group is a team like any other and needs to observe the standard rules for effective teams. This includes: keeping the team to a maximum of 15 people; using an agenda; assigning and reviewing action items; requiring attendance or providing an assigned, informed delegate with similar authority as an alternate; ensuring representation from all key personnel (i.e. all groups implementing project management); etc.

Do work closely with the organisational development organisation (or equivalent) – If the steering group is successful it will be changing policies, defining new career paths, creating new incentive plans, defining training requirements, etc. All of these issues frequently link with the organisational development group, and while they may not have project managers within their group, they may need to be present at every meeting to be supportive of the steering group's actions.

Do look for, and plan for, quick wins – Very few people have the stamina to maintain enthusiasm for the entire time that it is going to take an organisation to become project based. Do plan on having a "win" occurring every month or two that can be publicised and used to raise enthusiasm. Examples include putting up tools and templates on a web page, launching specialised training, revising job descriptions, revising project management processes; piloting a new project management tool; etc.

Do resolve the WIIFM issue – It always comes down to the fact that people do what they believe they are rewarded to do. Reward can come in many forms – financial, public or private recognition, promotions, perks, etc. For the steering group to be successful they must find some way of making project management success a personal issue for key stakeholders within the company. This could be by introducing project management success criteria into personal performance appraisals, printing special recognition on business cards, providing a financial bonus for an excellent project management plan, etc.

Don't expect to exist for only 6 months – Unfortunately change takes times. Too many steering groups think they will be disbanding in 6 months. Do plan on having specific goals, and do have exit criteria defined (i.e. the steering group is no longer needed when "X" happens within the company), but don't expect that to take only 6 months. Unless you have a very exceptional organisation!

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