

The Administration's Role in Project Management

By Bob Bremm

Before an institution embarks on a major construction project, the Administration needs to define individual roles in the project management process, and it needs to establish a chain of command.

Projects are complex and typically have tight budgets and tight schedules. An administrator may be involved in only one major project in their lifetime. This makes the construction process unknown, intimidating, and stressful. This is why it is so important to develop an understandable structure with well-defined roles at the very beginning. The more time spent up front in developing this structure and educating the impacted individuals, the less stressful and more effective the process will be.

The roles that must be created, defined, and authorized are:

- An Owner's Representative (who will be named in the contract documents)
- A Project Manager
- User Groups
- An Oversight Committee

The Administration needs to understand that a project is a long-term, multiyear commitment. The people that are assigned these roles must be able to put in the time necessary to stay with the project. If a person cannot make this commitment, then someone else should be assigned to this role. As in any administrative assignment, the level of authority should equal the level of responsibility.

The Owner's Representative

This is the individual who shall be the voice of the institution in contractual matters, and who will be a key decision-maker. Though this person can designate responsibilities to others, the Owner's Representative is clearly the person recognized by the contract as the being the voice of the Owner. It is important that this person has the availability, accessibility, and knowledge to make decisions. It should be decided early whether or not this person will attend all meetings or just key meetings. Key meetings would be monthly updates, major milestone updates, requisition meetings, steering committee meetings, and any other meetings that are deemed important. The Owner's Representative is typically a person who signs change proposals, change orders, and who authorizes payment for all requisitions



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The Project Manager

The Project Manager should have the skills and knowledge necessary to the planning, design, and construction process. The Project Manager should also be responsible for developing the total project budget and for tracking this budget daily. Typically, the Project Manager's job is full-time (or more), depending on the complexity of the project. Administration should appraise their in-house talent honestly and rigorously, including the individual's ability to commit this kind of time to a project. Then, the Administration should decide whether to stay with in-house talent, or whether they should hire a professional project management firm.

The Project Manager is the person key to the project's success or failure. The Project Manager is expected to attend virtually all design and construction meetings. The Project Manager should be involved at all Steering Committee and Board meetings that concern the project. In essence, all information flows from the Owner through the Project Manager to the architect and contractor and then back again. During construction, the Project Manager should work with the Owner's Representative for the day-to-day management of the project with periodic reports to Senior Administration or the Board.

Some Administrations choose to have decisions made at different levels based upon their staff's experience and the Administration's tolerance for risk. So, they may give the Project Manager total authority in making decisions, or they may give the Project Manager the authority to make all decisions on change proposals up to \$10,000. Any decisions that exceed that amount would go to the Owner's Representative or to the Senior Administrator in charge of the project. Most scenarios will work as long as the roles and rules are clearly established and understood. It is also important that the Project Manager and the Owner's Representative meet on a regular basis, and that the Owner's Representative is available for unexpected or emergency decisions.

User Groups

User Groups should be established fairly early in the project. A User Group is a constituency with a vested interest in the project, usually because they will move into the renovated or new spaces and will be operating there for quite some time. Each User Group should have a leader, whose responsibility is to 1) ensure User Group members are committed to making the appropriate meetings, 2) disseminate information to the User Groups, and 3) make sure that the group gives feedback and makes decisions in a timely fashion.

There can be a separate group known as the User Group Leaders. If there are not too many User Groups, the leaders may be members of the Steering Committee. The



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Leader Group can be helpful if issues need to be worked out related to adjacencies or competing interests, and if compromises need to be made.

Still another type of User Groups would be the facilities user groups. These typically consist of departments that will provide services to the new areas, and usually include the Facilities Department, Environmental Services Department and the Security Department. There may be other departments that should be considered as user groups if the impact of the new operations will affect them greatly.

A Steering Committee

An Administration may develop a Steering Committee (Oversight Committee) for a large project. This is a long-term commitment, and the role and authority of the Steering Committee must be determined very early on. Members of the Steering Committee should be committed to attending meetings consistently, so the committee will not hold up any key decisions or delay the schedule.

The most important time for a steering committee is during the conceptual and design stages of the project. This is a time when the project's scope is determined and decisions must be made in the best interest of the institution. This is the primary role of the Steering Committee. This is also the time when key budget decisions are made, competing interests reconciled, and value engineering decisions are considered. Once construction starts, the Steering Committee will have little or no role as the process is then driven by the contract and the project documents.



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