



PROJECT MANAGEMENT – A TOP MANAGER’S COMPETENCE?

“The whole world is a project” is what Prof. Ursula Schneider from the University in Graz is saying. And it’s true, regardless of whether it concerns our private life or business: we always hit upon project management. And in my opinion, **some of a top manager’s competences have its seeds in project management:**

- a. Managing short and narrow resources – or in project management’s language, “the project plan”
- b. The ability to think cross-linked – or in project management’s language, “program management”, which means managing different projects at the same time
- c. Dealing with uncertainties – or in project management’s language, simply “projects”

Managing short resources

Naturally a top manager is more in the position of the project sponsor than of the project manager – except in certain situations, for instance, in start-up companies or due to the lack of project management skills.

Therefore, it’s not his obligation to create or monitor project plans, but **it’s one of a top manager’s obligations to manage and provide resources** (time, money and people) to the appropriate project teams. I have experienced several projects, where either project team members didn’t have enough time to work on the project as well as their regular business, or those project team members – who were dedicated to the project weren’t trained and skilled properly (*because they were the only employees available at this time*).

Can you as a top manager put yourself into your project manager’s shoes in such a case? Or imagine how the coach (the project manager) can lead your national football team to success, although the presidents of the local football clubs (the top manager and the project sponsor respectively) are providing him with only the substitutes for the deciding game...

In case of so called cross-company projects, it’s even more difficult for the project manager, because he has to deal with internal associates as well as external resources such as suppliers, partners, IT providers, consultants, etc. And the top manager’s role is to keep the relationship of all the involved parties at a very high level.

If everything works fine, no intervention is needed, but what if, for instance, the project has already been delayed? Usually nervousness appears, and everyone shifts the blame onto others: the project manager blames the consultant for insufficient concept work, the IT provider blames the project team for unsatisfactory test results, and the guys from the partner company blame the IT provider for not having enough understanding concerning business-related items.



And now it's up to **the top manager to “put oil on troubled waters” before the whole situation collapses...**

The ability to think cross-linked

More and more companies are calling themselves “project-oriented”, but in truth their organizational structure is still very conservative, as in the form of line organizations, matrix organisations or something similar.

In my opinion, real project-oriented companies need a parallel – perhaps virtual – organizational structure.

For many top managers, two organizational structures within one company are not very easy to imagine, but once project management is implemented as a standard in a company, it's rather simple to run different projects with different scopes and sizes at the same time – parallel to the ordinary business.

In the same way as employees in a line organization are being developed from, for instance, junior experts to senior managers, project team members can be developed to senior project team members or project managers within the parallel organizational structure.

This will motivate people taking over responsibly for other projects as well as creating new project ideas and enabling companies to improve the quality of their projects. **And finally, you as a top manager will keep track of all the activities in your companies, literally with the click of a mouse.**

Dealing with uncertainties

How to start a project? This question is always connected with uncertainties, nervousness and doubts, but at the end it's like with a train: it's hard to get this heavy jumbo away from the start, but once it is moving, you can hardly stop it.

In August, 1999, I was asked to transfer a local radio station with all its interior and technical equipment from one location to another, approximately 15 km away. The whole project had to be finished by end of December 1999, because the lease agreement in the old broadcast studio had already been terminated. As a result, there was no time for a deep analysis, therefore there were a lot of *uncertainties* and surprises to be expected.

The owner's idea was to build a modern radio station including a unique and extraordinary broadcasting studio made of glass in a bank's hall. This project was so exciting and I was so *curious* about the result, because I hadn't seen anything similar until then, so I said YES – although the whole project team was more than nervous at this time.

Finally, on December 12th, 1999, the listeners heard the sound from the new radio station, and the *innovative* broadcasting studio was an attraction for both the customers of the bank and the passersby in front of the display window.

And a new management formula was created: **UNCERTAINTY + CURIOSITY = INNOVATION**