Career Development in Project-Based Organizations: Problems and Prospects

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Introduction

❑ **The Problem**

➢ Whilst project management experience is essential for senior management positions in a project-driven company it is not always enough.

➢ However, in an operations-driven organization, the experience and role of a project manager is not generally recognized, and senior executives are expected to demonstrate other skills.

❑ **The purpose** is to investigate whether project managers could become senior executives, to identify gaps in the skill sets of project managers and CEOs, and to determine how project managers could better design their career path to reach senior positions.

Research objectives and methodology

❑**Objectives:**

➢To understand the project managers' career path and their progression to CEO function in project-driven and operations-driven organizations.

➢To gauge the similarities and differences between the CEOs' and project managers' jobs.

❑**Methods**: Quantitative and qualitative research methods. Structured and unstructured interviews, and questionnaires. SAS software and matrix analysis.

Research objectives and methodology

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Participation

	CEOs	Project Managers
USA	4	3
Canada	1	-
Brazil	1	2
France	17	13
UK	1	-
Ukraine	1	2
TOTAL	**25**	**20**

Table 2

English language and French language questionnaires received

	English Questionnaire		French Questionnaire		*TOTAL*	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Project Driven	229	51.6	40	40	269	*49.4*
Operations-Driven	215	48.4	60	60	275	*50.6*
TOTAL	**444**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**544**	**100**
No (or incomplete) response	1	0.2	12	10.7	13	*2.3*
Response	444	99.8	100	89.3	544	*97.7*
TOTAL	*445*	*100*	*112*	*100*	*557*	*100*

Theoretical aspects and definitions

❑ *Effective Skills of Project Managers*

➤ While it is generally agreed that communication is the most important skill for project managers, conflict management, teamwork, political skills, negotiation skills, technical skills, and problem-solving are also considered essential
(Turner, 1999; Graham & Englund, 1997; Rad & Levin, 2002; Morris & Pinto, 2004)

➤ Effective project managers have been categorized as emotional and managerial *(Dulewicz and Higgs, 2003)* from the individual, team, and organizational perspectives
(Frame, 1999)

➤ The element of time or project phase plays a significant role in the way projects are led with a need for 'temporal leadership skills'
(Thoms and Greenberger, 1995; Thoms and Pinto, 1999; Prabhakar, 2005)

❑ *The Theory of Career Paths: project manager vs. functional manager*

➤ Definitions of career and career path vary from physically moving up through an organization by advancement, as a profession, a sequence of jobs, or as a sequence of role-related experiences *(Hall, 1976)* to the acquisition of experience and skill in terms of time, space, and the person themselves *(Super, 1980)*.

➤ A career is "the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time".
Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989a, p.8; 1989b)

❑ *Management support to Project managers*

Larson and Gobeli (1989) considered top management support and a clearly defined project mission as predictors of project success.

Research Results

Table 3

PM Career Paths and Project-Driven & Operations-Driven Organizations

	ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE							
	Formal PM Career Path		Partial PM Career Path		No Formal PM Career Path		TOTAL	
Organization Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Project-Driven	75	60.5	22	50.0	89	44.5	186	50.5
Operations-driven	49	39.5	22	50.0	111	55.5	182	49.5
TOTAL	**124**	**100**	**44**	**100**	**200**	**100**	**368**	**100**

Table 4

PM Career development

	English questionnaire	**French questionnaire**
Having a certain type of education	62.2	59.8
Having certain types of work experience	70.1	62.5
Networking and political skills	83.1	70.5

	Factors that prepare one for senior executive positions	Factors that prepare to reach a SE position % of the respondents	Factors that permit to work efficiently in a SE position % of the respondents
1	PM does not prepare	5.5	0.7
2	PM methodology prepares	7.5	4.8
3	Experience and skills prepare	73.6	94.5
4	Experience prepares	63.5	35.4
5	Soft skills prepare	25.8	59.8
6	Among the experiences (relating to item 4):		
	− Variety and complexity	23.7	10.9
	− Management	23.3	52.7
	− People Management	22.2	17.4
	− Vision and big picture	16.5	18.4
	− Power and network	3.7	8.6
7	Among the skills (relating to item 5)		
	− Decision making	16.7	12.5
	− Leadership	19.5	9.0
	− Communication	24.1	19.6
	− Negotiation	5.6	5.1

Table 5: Required skills of Senior Executive positions

Conclusion

❑To reach a senior executive position, a program/project manager must demonstrate capabilities beyond technical abilities that include strategic and soft skills.

❑A majority of the survey respondents believe that project/program management is a satisfactory path to reach a senior executive position.

❑In project-driven organizations, a program/project manager's career toward the top is generally assured. In operations-driven organizations, the situation is different and, in many cases, not currently very encouraging. The project manager is often seen as a technician.

Thank you for your attention!

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