



Project Coordinator Vs Project Manager

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Differences between a project coordinator and a project manager?

Project Coordination can cover a lot of roles and responsibilities depending upon the organisation and how they have allocated them throughout the business.

Coordination can range from administration duties (maintenance of project documentation, plans and reports), through engineering duties (maintenance of headcount databases, materials, configuration management) right up to junior project management duties (updating risk/opportunity registers, schedule updates, financial updates).

The main difference is that although the project coordinator may do some of the project management work, the project manager is ultimately responsible and accountable for the successful delivery of the project outputs. The project manager can delegate work, but still retains the responsibility and accountability.

Most projects have a project manager on a project but let us see how the role a project manager and a project coordinator play in a project and the advantages of having a project coordinator on a project.

The roles of a project manager and a project coordinator are closely related.

Take for example, an **information systems project** with all of its complexities of design, quality management and training.

- A project manager is responsible for the overall project.
- A project coordinator implements the system by building networks of cooperation for each segment.
- The project coordinator works with the project manager as his ally.
- The project manager provides leadership while the coordinator puts the team and process together for project implementation.



By definition, project managers must efficiently and effectively execute projects.

Firstly, they must balance both internal and external stakeholder interests and keep both sides in sync over time.

*Second, they must understand **customers' requirements**, address their changing needs and manage the dynamics of those changes.*

However, they must also manage those changes throughout the enterprise, vendors, suppliers and partners.

Let's take an example wherein a project manager has to manage a customer, project sponsor and five representative users, in all 7 stakeholders.

The formula for calculating number of communication channels is $N(N-1)/2$.

So our project manager is having $7(7-1)/2 = 21$ communication channels without the development team.

Say that the project is outsourced offshore to a team of 9 developers.

Now the communication channels he has to handle are $16(16-1)/2 = 120$.

Usually 80% of the Project Manager's time is spent in communication. Do you not think this will be overwhelming for a Project Manager when he has to manage 120 communication channels that too most of them being **offshore** with **time zone** and **cultural differences**.

This is where the Project Coordinator comes in:

with a Project Coordinator in the team let us look at how the scenario changes.

Project Manager now has to manage $8(8-1)/2 = 28$ communication channels instead of the whopping 120 and the Project Coordinator takes care of $10(10-1)/2 = 45$.

Now let's take a look at the definition of a Project Coordinator.

Project Coordinator

*The role and responsibilities of a **Project Coordinator** are usually a **subset of that of a Project Manager**. The primary responsibility of a project coordinator is to keep the project and all related processes running smoothly.*

Project teams often require **coordination** of **activities**, **resources**, **equipment**, and **information**.

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Any coordination issues which cannot be resolved are elevated to the project manager (escalation).

Research indicates that there is a strong correlation between components of **trust** and **productivity** .

Trust is based on **communication effectiveness, conflict management and rapport**.

Cultural differences play a key role in building trust and the person managing the multicultural teams needs to understand this.

For instance, **in the west usually punctuality is taken for granted** whereas in places in the east where the infrastructure issues could exist say power failures, water logging, transport strikes even though a person might want to be on time but for reasons beyond his control is delayed. Failing to understand this, the first may conclude that the second is **lazy, obstructionist, or dishonest**.

The second person will expect **respect** for the natural order of things.

Cultural differences in multicultural teams can create misunderstandings between team members before they have had a chance to establish any credibility with each other.

Hence a Project Coordinator should be preferably be a person who understands both the offshore and onsite cultures and helps in building trust which is a critical step in creation and development of multicultural teams in addition to that he / she will bring following advantages to the project

- **One point of contact** and thus **reducing the number of communication channels** for the Project Manager.
- Time Zone Management
- Cross Cultural Management including HR issues.
- Creating Teams based on competencies and skills. For example in Agile development process you might want to have team members working as “Pairs” where in a more experienced developer is paired with a relatively less experience person or a new team member to bring the person up to a particular level. The project coordinator can decide which team members will be paired.
- Task Assignment based on the competencies of the team members as he/she knows the team closely.



people and one person can perform many roles. For example, an organization may have 10 people who can perform the role of project manager, although traditionally each project only has one project manager at any one time; and a person who is able to perform the role of project manager may also be able to perform the role of business analyst and tester.

Depending on the skill and experience of the Project Coordinator, he/she can also be involved in the Quality and Requirements Management Areas as well. You can make use of the **RACI** (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) model to define the roles and responsibilities of the Project Manager and a Project Coordinator. The success of your offshore effort will largely depend of how it is managed. It is advisable to have at least a Project Coordinator on the project and preferably offshore.

Description of Roles

- Project Manager is responsible for identifying and resolving project issues, making sure the project progresses on schedule and on budget. PM is the point of communication with stakeholders and is accountable for the project's success. A project manager seeks help from a project coordinator to expedite tasks after the planning phase.
- Project Coordinator's role is to coordinate activities, resources, equipment and information and bring to the attention of the project manager any coordination issues which they cannot resolve.

Scheduling

- Project coordinators have **expertise on scheduling**. Project managers who try to control scheduling may end up focusing away from their management role because of the **complexity of the scheduling** issues. Ideally, the project coordinator develops the **initial project schedule**, making certain that all **scheduling conflicts** are resolved with routine updates with the project manager's final approval.

Qualities

- A project coordinator must have skills of adaptability, versatility with administrative and facilitation skills to keep the project focused on its objectives.
- A project manager must have good communication skills in acting as the liaison between the project team, subcontractor, customer and upper management. PM's communications keep the project flowing. PM identifies potential problems and encourages suggestions to improve the overall performance of the project for



Challenges

- A project manager relies on senior management support for detailed information in the project plan. Without enough detail, he can lose control resulting in team conflict. **Lack of senior management support** can be particularly challenging when the project itself does not meet all stakeholder needs. A project coordinator's major challenge is that he/she has responsibility with limited authority. As a result, the PM may appear to be demanding if he/she assigns tasks since she does not carry authority.



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