

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellow, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change. - Robert F. Kennedy

In today's global business world projects are an integral component of doing business in a complex marketplace. An organization's ability to adapt to changing market conditions, new technologies, or workforce diversity may depend on its ability to execute projects efficiently and effectively.

Much of what has been written about project management addresses knowledge areas and processes, aligning to the Project Management Institute's, A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, 4th Edition (Project Management Institute, Inc., 2008). Many authors focus on organizational delivery goals as measured by the triple constraints; scope, schedule, and budget. Others address tools and methodologies. Technology, tools, and techniques are not the reasons projects fail; they fail because of people (Flannes & Levin, 2001). Since human beings are social creatures, leveraging social characteristics is important in order to execute projects successfully. As the discipline grows, the human side of project management must be considered.

For purposes of this writing, a social characteristic is defined as an interpersonal skill such as collaboration, negotiation, communication, or team building. Social characteristics are human attributes. The importance of a social characteristic may vary from one person to another or from one organization to another organization. Although a definition may be subjective, the field of project management may generally agree on the meaning of a social characteristic; including its importance within the discipline.

Acknowledging the value of social characteristics or interpersonal skills is important

- from a project perspective
- from an organizational perspective

In a real world context, there are ever-changing, multiple, and dynamic influences that impact projects. The world is messy and increasingly complex. Utilizing interpersonal skills helps to navigate uncertain, complex issues.

Project managers deal with day to day project challenges which include but are not limited to cross functional politics, sub-team concerns, team member conflict, resource, schedule, and budget constraints. Additionally, organizational goals and leadership pressures often fall downward, to the project manager.

Over the years, if a project was assessed as a failure, the project managers were blamed and often relieved of their duties and responsibilities. Failures were most often identified as quantitative failures and were associated with poor planning, unreliable cost and schedule estimating, and poor control (Kerzner & Saladis, 2009).

The phrase, the project manager is accountable, is resoundingly true. Project managers quickly learn resilience.

While poor planning, cost estimating, or monitoring and controlling may cause project failure, managers often overlooked the fact that failure may have been the result of behavior issues such as poor morale, lack of employee commitment, lack of functional unit commitment or support, poor productivity, and poor human relations (Kerzner & Saladis, 2009).

Project managers feel downward pressure. They also feel upward demands from team members and the day-to-day execution of project activities. Project and organizational pressures often appear to converge at the project management level. Just as project management is critical to business success, the role of project manager is organizationally pivotal.

Project managers who combine his/her technical skills while understanding the importance of interpersonal skills are well suited to managing projects. They use an integrated project management approach which includes acknowledging and utilizing social competencies while executing processes (initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and closing (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), 2008). This includes being aware of social costs such as poor human relations, low morale, or employee turnover for they can impact project performance. Essentially, it is the socially aware manager that finds a way to connect with team members. They build relationship.

Organizations on the other hand, may talk the talk but not walk the walk when bottom line financials are at risk. They emphasize delivering a project in terms of business investment and realized benefit. In today's business environment, many project based organizations are mechanically driven. They emphasize process, methodology, and measure success metrically. The human side of project management is often left solely to the project manager while operating in an environment where social costs are largely ignored.

Organizations that understand social characteristic value are better positioned to provide a culture where project managers are supported. When organizations understand social characteristic value, promote using them, and recognize the use of interpersonal skills in a daily work environment, it helps to create a culturally aware environment. In many organizations this means a paradigm shift away from a results only perspective to include an intangible understanding that social characteristics are critical to success too.

Interpersonal skills, within the project management discipline, are emerging as an area of study. Project managers who extend this concept to an understanding of and acceptance of other cultures are positioned for the global arena. Project managers who adapt to diversity, including a multi-generational workforce, are highly marketable and in demand to multi-national organizations.