

The Key to Being a Good PM: Go Operational

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The PMI PMBOK guide defines a project as “a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service or result.” (PMBOK guide, 3rd edition) So we all know what a project is.....it has a beginning, an end and something unique in between. However, those of us that have worked on large implementations, especially those where new processes or systems are being implemented, know that there is sometimes a fine line between project close and organization open. What I mean by this is that many projects these days focus on reengineering, or optimizing, or consolidating, or centralizing, but the common theme is that the organization does not look the same after the project is complete. Resources are re-deployed or let go, manual processes become automated and organizations focus on more value-added activities. So where do the project manager's responsibilities end?

As a project manager, how can you lead an organization through a large transformation implementation without defining the new organization or at least participating in its development? My experience is that this is “bonus work” that the project manager performs, because most companies do not think of it up front when staffing the project team. Project managers are brought in to lead the team through the implementation, but someone must perform the tasks once the project ends.....that is where the operational team comes in. A good PM will be thinking about the operational team right from the get go, even while developing the project team. A good PM will be identifying where knowledge transfer needs to occur later on and a good PM will be advising their organization or client that these decisions need to be considered earlier - not later - in the project timelines. No one wants to complete a successful project implementation only to realize that there is no one to perform the ongoing work. Regardless of how successful the implementation may seem, if that is the case, then the PM has failed.

An easy way around this is to think operationally right from the start. Ask questions like: What should the organization look like when the project is over? Who will support the systems and processes? Who will carry the torch when the PM disappears? Then and only then, can one achieve serenity and success as a PM, and that success takes the form of a stable organization instead of one in flux, scrambling to determine roles and responsibilities.

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