

# How To Get Executives To Act For Project Success

Michael O'Brochta, PMP  
President, Zozer Inc.

## Abstract

Even world-class project managers will not succeed unless they get their executives to act for project success. The trap of applying best-practice project management only to have the project fail because of executive inaction or counteraction can be avoided. Increasing numbers of project managers are looking for ways to deal with this reality.

This is a how-to paper. It describes how project managers can get their executives to act, and it identifies the top ten executive actions most likely to contribute to project success. This paper explores why the evolving and expanding definition of project success and why the expanding complexity of projects have led to an environment in which the project manager is ever more dependent on the executive. It draws upon recent research about top performing project managers, about why executives fail, and about why new products fail to identify the basis for a strong mutual partnership between project managers and executives. A central theme is that project managers are empowered to extend their sphere of influence beyond the immediate project boundaries up into the organization not only to get their executives to act but also to help implement the actions as well.

The impact of organizational maturity, organizational change readiness, and the differing viewpoints and communication styles between executives and project managers are related to the timing and pace for the executive actions. A project management council and a project champion role are described as key approaches for project managers to use to amplify their influence to get executives to act.

## Introduction

### The Problem

Project managers are falling into the trap of applying best-practice project management **only to have the project fail because of executive inaction or counteraction**. Project managers who continue doing what used to work by focusing within the bounds of the project are now finding success more difficult to achieve. The problem is that project success is dependent to an increased degree not only on the efforts of the project manager but also on the efforts of the executive as well. This explains why three-quarters of the employees surveyed (Towers 2008) in a large global study "said that their organizations or senior management don't do enough to help them fully engage and contribute to their companies' success." The problem is understanding how to get executives to act for project success.

### The Context

This is a good news story. **Much is known about the important role executives play in project success** and about how the project manager can get executives to act for project success; authors and practitioners have been seriously engaged with this subject in the last decade. Equally important, much is known about the important role **project managers play in executive success**. This paper draws from numerous references and blends the wisdom from these sources with my experiences and opinions. As a senior project manager at the CIA, I led the program to mature the project management practices agency-wide by developing and managing an internal project manager certification program that involved two-thousand project managers per year. In this capacity I routinely met project management students who returned to their work place and encountered difficulty applying a best practice approach or technique learned in training because of something their executive was doing or not doing. My observations of and interactions with these project managers and their executives serve as a basis for some of the views expressed in this paper.

## **Executive Definition**

For the purpose of conveying the concepts in this paper, a broad definition has been adopted for the executive. An executive is defined as a person responsible for the administration of a business or department. This executive may be an individual, or it may be a function performed by more than one individual. On an organization chart the executive appears above other individuals and functions, including the project manager. An executive who is focused on the business operations and processes associated with the department in which the project resides would be a likely candidate to act for project success. Ideally, this executive is positioned close enough to the project work to be able to have a genuine impact.

## **Times Have Changed**

### **Success More Elusive**

Project success is tough to achieve. The often cited Chaos Report (Standish 2006) shows that 65% of projects are still outright failures or challenged to the point of not meeting the time/cost/performance triple constraint. For many of us, the situation is even worse. The definition of project success has expanded beyond the Chaos data to the point of being far harder to achieve, projects are becoming even more complex, and the gap between what executives and project managers know about projects is widening.

### **Success Definition Expanded**

A big change over time has been the definition of project success; it has been greatly expanded (Kerzner 2001, Archibald 2003). In the 1960s, the early days of project management, success was measured entirely in technical terms. Either the deliverable product worked or it didn't. During the 1970s that narrow definition was expanded to encompass completion on time, within budget, and at an acceptable level of quality. This has become known as the triple constraint and has been widely used as the basis for much of the project management industry. During the 1980s, further expansion took place to include criteria relating to customer acceptance. And during the 1990s still more criteria were added, having to do with not disturbing the main work flow of the organization and without changing the corporate culture. This expansion has been difficult for some to deal with, while others have folded a success definition step into their life cycle process (O'Brochta 2002).

### **More Complexity**

Projects are more complex, so much so, that success through the actions of the individual project manager is increasingly rare. Projects are more interconnected, more interdependent, and more interrelated than ever before. So too are the businesses in which projects are being conducted; businesses now have complex alliances with strategic suppliers, networks of customers, and partnerships with allies and even with competitors. The result is that business systems are significantly more complex than in the past. Gone are the days where the usual project deliverable is a stand-alone product used by a single customer; instead, systems are being delivered for groups of stakeholders with diverging needs (Hass 2007).

### **Growing Gap**

Another big change over time has been the widening of the gap in understanding the discipline of project management. The recent explosive growth in adoption of project management by employees and organizations has left many executives lagging behind (CBP 2003). The evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the 250% increase in PMI® membership in the past five years (PMI 2008) and in the 30% increase in the introduction of project management within organizations in just a three year period (PMW 2003). Listening to the famous international business guru Tom Peters state that "All work is project work" makes the point about how pervasive projects have become (Peters 1999). Listening to students lament at the end of a project management training class about how "they wish that their boss could have taken the class" puts a human perspective on the statistics. More and more employees are ever more knowledgeable about project management, they are working in organizations

that are progressively more project based, and they are increasingly frustrated by executives who are not at a level of project management understanding to act adequately for project success.

## **Project Manager Dependent**

How do project managers deal with the expanded definition of project success, with the growing understanding gap, and with the increased project complexity? The simple answer is that as project managers we cannot keep doing what we have been doing and expect to succeed. The answer is that our traditional control-based approach toward the management of projects is becoming less effective; in that approach we sought to employ the planning as well as the monitoring and controlling process groups in the PMBOK® (PMI 2004). What we could not control we learned to influence, and what we could not influence we learned to be aware of so that we could be ready with corrective actions. The answer is that as project managers we must now turn to an increasing degree to the executive. We have, for better or worse, become highly dependent on the executive. Project success now depends on our ability to **form a beneficial partnership with the executive**. Project success now depends on understanding how to get executives to take the necessary actions to partner with the project manager.

## **What Executive Actions**

### **Much Known**

The good news associated with the topic of executive actions for project success is that experienced project managers have been articulate about the actions that they would like their executives to take. Publications address creating the project environment (Graham 1997), excellence in project management (Kerzner 1998), implementing project management in any organization (Heerkens 2000), creating a project management center of excellence (Schneidmuller 2000), moving beyond the wall of resistance (Maurer 1996), and the best practices of project management groups in large functional organizations (PMI 1997). Publications also address achieving management commitment through sponsorship (Englund 2006), and research is now emerging about the sponsor's role in the various project phases (Kloppenborg 2006). By all means, read these publications and other references and **make a list** for yourself of the actions that you would like your executive to take that will help your project succeed.

### **Executive Actions List**

Consider my list; it is what top-performing project managers want, and need, from their executives. It has been assembled and distilled during the past few years as I have increased the amount of consulting that I have done with executives and project managers (Exhibit 1). I have asked for and received many similar lists from project managers whom I have coached during workshops on this very subject. Those interactions, combined with my experiences managing and helping project managers, have led me to revise and refine this list. As much as possible I have trimmed the list to a minimum number of actions, I've focused on actions that are practical and achievable in most organizational cultures, and I have eliminated actions better suited to project managers and others. When adjusting the list, recognize that deciding what to include on this list and acting on it require considerable sensitivity to those involved and to the situation.

At the top of the list of executive actions are organizing the work into projects and then picking the right projects. Project managers can feel like fish out of water when they work in an environment that does not **organize and manage work as projects**. Much effort can be spent trying to convince and educate the myriad stakeholders about the merits of project basics, such as requirements definition, baselines, schedules, and configuration control. This often frustrating time could be better spent if the department or section of the organization organized itself to be project based, if it were separated from the ongoing and repetitive operations. Project managers can easily drown when they have too many projects to work on. **Picking the right projects** can be as sophisticated as strategic portfolio management or as simple as doing only those projects for which the project managers and project teams have the capacity to do. I favor the simple approach: do only as many projects as can be done well; don't agonize over the decisions about which projects to undertake. Actual research into the optimum number of projects for a project manager to manage successfully is sparse; however, the few works that I have come across do coincide with empirical evidence. Fewer projects are better; fewer projects mean more time spent per project. Fewer projects

mean that ultimately more projects conclude successfully. The optimum number of projects per project manager seems to range between three and eight; more results in a quantum decline in the project success rate.

<b>What To Do</b>	<b>How To Do It</b>
<b>Organize and Manage Work as Projects</b>	Structure work into distinct projects with designated project manager. Actively participate as a sponsor. Be accountable to the project manager. Grant authority. Establish and manage against baselines.
<b>Pick the Right Projects</b>	Clearly identify a limited number of top priority projects. Fewer projects equate to more success and higher output. Avoid overcommitting on too many projects.
<b>Maintain Close Stakeholder Relationships</b>	Work with stakeholders and customers to enhance project manager relationships. Build credibility and equity. Manage benefits.
<b>Use Suitable Project Management Process</b>	Provide a project management process suitable for the type of work and the experience level of the project managers. Advocate process tailoring for each project.
<b>Ensure Projects Follow Documented Plan</b>	Require documented project plans. Provide adequate time for and resist pressure to shortcut planning. Use baseline plan as basis for decisions. Maintain accountability to the plan.
<b>Ensure Projects Based On Requirements</b>	Require documented project requirements. Provide adequate time for and resist pressure to shortcut requirements definition. Use baseline requirements as basis for decisions. Maintain accountability to the requirements.
<b>Require Basis for Cost Estimates</b>	Require cost estimates to have a written definitive basis. Include risks and management reserve. Link costs to schedule and requirements.
<b>Ensure Resources are Sufficient</b>	Ensure that adequate resources are provided; avoid shortchanging. Solicit impact assessment in response to change. Adjust resources in relation to schedule and requirements adjustments.
<b>Engage Middle Management Help</b>	Ensure middle managers work to resolve conflicts, make decisions, and provide project assistance.
<b>Use Job Performance Standards</b>	Treat project management as a profession. Establish and use project management job definitions, performance standards, and career paths. Reward results and professionalism.
<b>Behave Like Executive - Ask The Right Questions</b>	Understand the relationship between the executive and project manager roles. Practice servant leadership. Create a culture for project success. Ask the questions to engage the project manager.

### **Exhibit 1 – Executive Actions**

Executives have a unique responsibility to **develop and maintain close stakeholder and customer relationships** that complement and enhance the relationships formed by the project manager. According to *The Standard For Program Management*, benefits management is a primary responsibility for those that operate at levels above the project manager (PMI 2006). The time invariably comes when an issue, concern, or decision needs to be addressed by someone other than the project manager. Project funding, priority, and requirements are often topics that benefit from this type of supportive intervention. Note that these executive relationships should be conducted

so that the project manager's authority and responsibility are maintained and so that the project manager is kept in the loop and well informed. Ideally, it is the project manager who is serving up the topics for the executive to act on.

Project management is a discipline and, as such, benefits by **adhering to a suitable project management process**. Project managers who are at the top of their game have come to rely on executives to establish a standardized process for their organization to use. They seek to be held accountable for applying tailored versions of this process to each of their projects, and they rely on others to do the same. They can, in the absence of executive action, develop and follow their own processes, but they recognize the limits in efficiency and effectiveness of doing so.

Project managers expect executives to ensure that they **follow a documented project plan and ensure that projects are based on documented requirements**. They expect to be given adequate time up front during the initial project phase to build these baseline documents and to be isolated from pressure to proceed hastily without them; they also expect to be held accountable for continuous controlled revisions to these documents through the project life cycle. To help with the understanding of these baseline documents executives should **require cost estimates to have a written definitive basis**. In return for managing their projects according to plan, project managers look to their executives to **ensure that project resources (time, people, and money) are commensurate with needs**. If shortages and/or changes occur, the executive should expect to receive an impact assessment from the project manager that has been developed in an environment without excessive pressure to absorb the change or simplistically do more with less. This impact assessment, which could serve as the basis for plan revisions, will be formulated with respect to the plans, requirements, and other documents that have been baselined.

Actions by the executive need to be taken to **engage middle management help** and to **establish and use job definitions and performance standards**. By holding middle managers responsible for supporting project managers and by ensuring that career progression and growth is aligned with best practice project management, the executive will create a long-lasting and sustainable project-based culture. They can demonstrate their commitment to this culture by **behaving like executives and asking the right questions** of their project managers. Each executive can acknowledge that their role is enhanced when they behave like a servant leader in a role supportive of the project manager. In this culture the executive will attract, retain, and grow project management excellence.

## Executive Questions

Here is a list that is an absolute favorite of the executives with whom I consult (Exhibit 2). One executive, whom I have known for years and have worked with recently, has actually had this list reduced in size and laminated; he wears it around his neck attached behind his employee badge, and he glances casually at it when he finds himself in a meeting with a project manager. This list helps him to behave like an executive and ask the right questions. It helps minimize traditional distractions to get into the project details, to solve the project issues, or to do the project manager's job for them. The list is my own; like the list of executive actions, it has evolved over time. At this point it has become stable; I do occasionally add or subtract from it. It is also a tool that should be used with caution. It is offered as a starting point for executives who are looking to **begin behaving quickly and effectively** in a way that demonstrates their support for project managers. At the top of the list is perhaps the most effective question for the executive to ask, "What can I do to help?" The effectiveness of this question has repeatedly been demonstrated during the thirty years since it was first associated with the groundbreaking servant leadership approach into the nature of power and greatness (Greenleaf 2002).

**What can I do to help?  
What are the requirements?  
What is the plan?  
What is the status compared to the plan?  
What are the top risks and mitigation?  
How do the stakeholders feel?  
What is the basis?  
How do you know?**

### Exhibit 2 – Executive Questions

# Barriers To Executive Action

## Executive Limitations

Even the most progressive executives who are interested in supporting project managers by acting for project success often find that easier said than done. The demands of their executive responsibilities, the constraints they encounter both real and imagined, and their limited understanding of the discipline of project management hinder even the most enthusiastic among them. It is essential for project managers who want to get their executives to act for project success to understand the barriers that their executives face. Only after gaining this insight can a project manager understand how effectively to get their executive to take the actions necessary for project success.

## Work Obstacles

The executive's work life differs from that of the project manager (Archibald 2003). Whereas project managers tend to view project management quite personally, often with little or no distinction between their performance and the performance of the project, **executives tend to see project management as a means to an end**, as a good way of motivating people toward achievement of specific objectives, as a source of future executives, and a means to achieve strategic objectives. The executive environment comes complete with its own issues, barriers, and frustrations. Some executives lament that despite investing in raising the level of project manager competence, projects themselves still seem to take too long, cost too much, and produce less than the desired results (Englund 2006). Even the executive who is fully committed to acting for project success must **confront the realities of executive and organizational life**. The consequence of these realities is often a set of limitations and/or barriers challenging even the most motivated executive.

## Organizational Restrictions

Organizations are organic; they have attributes and may even be considered to have personalities. Organizational behavior and social science come into play. **Organizations impose limitations on what can be done by the executive**. We can turn to the body of work that addresses project management maturity for an understanding of the limits in what actions an organization can succeed at taking (Ibbs 1997, Kerzner 2001, Crawford 2002). This work teaches us that the lower maturity organizations are characterized by ad-hoc activity with little or no formal project procedures; individual heroics that occasionally result in success are rewarded. In contrast, formal, well-defined, and repeatable processes that are undergoing continuous improvement characterize high maturity organizations; success is intentional and can more easily be replicated. For example, if we are in the typical lower level maturity organization, it would not only be inappropriate but also counterproductive if the executive attempted to install an enterprise-wide project management information system just so a project manager could have easy access to financial data for a single project. Instead, the executive would be better served by tasking the finance department to extract from the data they already have and deliver it consistent with a specified project template. The executive actions must **conform to the maturity of the organization**. In addition, organizations can only change when the timing is right, and even then, the pace of change is limited. Organizations and individuals are at **varying levels of change readiness**. It does little good to push for a change if the individuals and/or the organization are not ready; in fact, it is counterproductive and "sours the well water" for future attempts at similar changes. High readiness levels are characterized by strong desires for change and readiness for it; a strong resistance to change characterizes low readiness levels. Moderate readiness levels are characterized by a desire for change but a lack of readiness. For example, if there were a merger yesterday, and if today there were reorganization, then tomorrow would not be a good time for an executive to try to implement a substantial change to the standard corporate product development life cycle. A more appropriate executive action would be to grant approval for a single project to tailor the standard life cycle in a way that benefits the project but does not broadly impact other projects and processes in the organization. The executive actions must **conform to the change readiness level of the organization**.

## People Constraints

People, after all, are at the center of the executive's work life. And in organizations, where there are people, there is politics (Pinto 1996). And politics was at the top of the list of executives surveyed and interviewed recently at the CIA (O'Brochta 2006). **Politics was identified** as a leading source for conflicting demands on the

executive, as the source for project scope creep, as a source of shifting of focus for project goals, and as a cause for fluctuations in staffing and financial resources. Short-term, bottom-line, mission-related demands were frequently cited as taking priority over longer-term strategic goals, such as acting for project success. The “just get it done” mentality that can pervade other aspects of an organization can also dominate the executive’s life. When executives were asked why they did not take more actions for project success, they invariably wove the topic of politics into their answer. They also wove in the fact that they have **limitations in authority** that prevent, or at least make difficult, acting for project success. For example, in some functional organizations, executives with responsibility for project portfolios and programs do not have commensurate authority over resources. Some executives report that they do not even have authority over decisions about which projects get assigned to or removed from their organization. Other people-related barriers frequently offered by executives are trust and openness. Executives described these as attributes in relationships with project managers that were elusive. The gap in positional authority, the drive for accountability, the “don’t want to hear bad news” symptom were all offered as partial explanations for the difficulties in establishing and maintaining trust. Yet, given the typical executive’s dilemma of being overwhelmed with information while simultaneously feeling under-informed (Archibald 2003), trust and openness represent the keys to providing the executive with crisp, concise, and accurate project information.

## How To Get Executives To Act For Project Success

### Use the Executive Actions List

The goal of project success can be reached by having the executive overcome the barriers and take the actions for project success that are found on the Executive Actions list. The approach to accomplish this goal involves having project managers help their executives overcome the barriers. This method builds upon and reinforces the dependent relationship between project managers and executives, and it is based on the technique for project managers to influence without authority. It requires the project manager to **tailor the Executive Actions List** to reflect the realities and limitations imposed by the barriers.

### Emphasize Value of Successful Projects

Successful projects are critically important to the executive who understands that the number one reason for executive failure is not because of lack of vision or strategy. According to Fortune Magazine (Charan 1999), “It’s bad execution. As simple as that: not getting things done, being indecisive, not delivering on commitments.” Furthermore, “while average CEO tenure in the biggest companies has remained fairly steady at seven to eight years, those who don’t deliver are getting pushed out quicker...poorly performing CEOs are three times more likely to get booted than they were a generation ago. Either they deliver, soon, or they’re gone.” Since project management is all about getting things done and delivering on commitments, it is very well positioned to be the cornerstone upon which executive success is built. Projects by definition involve delivering a product or service at a defined point in time, just what the executive needs to achieve success in their jobs. **The executive is dependent on project success.** Raising awareness of this dependence is key toward gaining executive interest and support in taking actions for project success. It is, after all, in the executive’s self-interest.

### Underscore Importance of Project Management

Project management is key to getting new corporate initiatives accomplished. For almost two decades the standard of excellence for research in the new product development area (Cooper 2001) has been set through the examination of more than 2,000 new product launches at hundreds of companies. This research has clearly identified that the new theme is the need for speed and its companion need for change. The research shows that nothing is static, markets are fluid, and needs change at a far faster rate today than ever before. This demand for speed, coupled with fluid markets, requires reducing the cycle time between concept and product. Project management is about the management of cycle time; it is about tailoring the variety of available life cycles to the particulars of a given project to increase the probability of success. As such, project management serves as a critical enabler for executive success in the environment that rewards speed.

## Behave Like an Alpha

Since executives benefit from dependence on projects and on project management, they are well served by relying on top project managers. As a result of a recent survey of over five thousand project managers and stakeholders, we now have extraordinary insight into what the top 2% know and do that everyone else does not (Crowe 2006). This survey focused on identifying the best project managers (referred to as Alpha project managers) and then on determining what they did that made them the best. The study results reveal large differences between what the Alpha project managers believe and do versus the non-Alpha project managers. The Alphas were found to **believe strongly that they had enough authority** to manage the project (89% for Alphas vs. 49% for non-Alphas). The non-Alphas waited to be given the authority and lamented when it was not forthcoming. This result is consistent with the understanding that the executives who are most likely to succeed are adept at good execution, and who better to perform this execution than the project manager who is taking action and not waiting to be given authority.

## Communicate Using Business Context

How a project manager communicates has at least as much effect on the executive as what he communicates. Much has been done to elevate the level of understanding of how to “sell” project management to senior executives (Thomas 2002). This excellent body of work instructs project managers to emphasize alignment of project management and project goals with corporate goals and value statements. It identifies the value of using business language and **putting the project in context** of business value where project aspects that relate to financial, growth, customer satisfaction, competition, and sales are emphasized. Data is available for the project manager to use to support making the business case. Thanks to research (Pennypacker 2002, Ibbs 2002), we can use some facts and figures to address how much better business performance is at companies with more mature project management practices (25% sales growth, 88% return on investment, 61% productivity increase), how much better project performance is at companies with more mature project management practices (schedule performance index is about twice as good), and how much more predictable project performance is (standard deviation for schedule performance index drops from 20% to as low as 5%). A key that appears throughout the topic of communicating with executives about project management is the need to identify what triggers the executive’s interest, to develop a set of responses tailored to each trigger, and to back up each response with evidence that is relevant to each individual executive. If the executive’s hot button is growth, then framing the project management related action for the executive in terms of growth would be the most effective communication approach.

## Understand And Use Power

Project managers have at their disposal an extremely effective tool for overcoming barriers and getting their executive to act for project success. Through the understanding and use of power, the project manager can accomplish a tremendous amount. Power refers to the ability of the project manager to influence others to act for the benefit of their project; it is a resource that enables compliance or commitment from others. We again benefit from the work of others (Maurer 1996, Pinto 1996, Verma 1995); all provide insight into the sources and effective use of power. We can recognize that as project managers we do have opportunities to **develop and use sources of power that others don’t**. Specifically, we are the experts; no one knows more about our project than we do. This knowledge can serve as the basis for opinions, decisions, and actions that are rational and well supported. This source of power can distinguish the actions we want the executive to take from the blur of other activity that fills their job. A second source of power at the project manager’s disposal is their perceived association with others who are influential. Successful project managers develop and cultivate relationships with a vast array of stakeholders that extend far beyond the immediate bounds of their project. The fact that so many projects are managed in matrix organizations further enhances this effect. Others perceive these connections as a significant source of power, one that can and should be used by the project manager to get executives to act for project success.

## Leverage Sponsors and Champions

A project manager can build upon their power by developing and harnessing the power of project sponsors and champions. Project sponsorship has been established as a key responsibility with defined duties for some executives (Englund 2006, Whitten 2002). These responsibilities include seller, coach and mentor, filter, business



judge, motivator, negotiator, protector, and most importantly, supporter. For those project managers unable to round up all of the necessary sponsor support an alternative has emerged: the project champion. Here we have a key lieutenant of the sponsor who is likely more approachable and accessible than the sponsor (Campbell 2007). Here we have an individual with authority who is trusted by the sponsor and who can work directly with the project manager. Here we have a connection path for the project manager to sources of higher authority in the organization.

<b>What To Do</b>	<b>How To Do It</b>
<b>Use the Executive Actions List</b>	Make a list of desired executive actions for project success. Tailor the list. Use the list.
<b>Emphasize Value of Successful Projects</b>	Since the number one reason for executive failure is bad execution, recognize the dependence of executives on projects (which are about execution).
<b>Underscore Importance of Project Management</b>	Since the new theme in new product development is for speed, recognize dependence of executives on project management (which is about speed management).
<b>Behave Like An Alpha</b>	Since the number one reason for executive failure is bad execution, recognize the dependence of executives on project managers who act as if they have authority (as the top 2% of project managers do). Act like an Alpha.
<b>Communicate Using Business Context</b>	Express project benefits and performance in business terms. Speak the executive's language. Reference the value of project management research.
<b>Understand and Use Power</b>	Use sources of expert power and associative sources of power to influence without authority.
<b>Leverage Sponsors and Champions</b>	Amplify project manager power through relationships with sponsors and champions.
<b>Form a Project Management Council</b>	Amplify project manager power through relationships with project management thought leaders. Help executives implement the desired actions for project success.

### **Exhibit 3 – Project Manager Actions**

#### **Form a Project Management Council**

And now for the “silver bullet” approach that can work in virtually all situations, with differing viewpoints, with differing levels of project management ability, with various business contexts, across organizational maturity barriers, and across change readiness levels. The approach is to **form a Project Management Council**. It can be the key to identifying the actions for the executive to take for project success. It can **amplify the power of the project manager** to get executives to act for project success. It is a favorite approach. I have used it often, and so have many others (Crawford 2002, Rad 2002, Englund 2003, Bolles 2002, Dai 2002, Bridges 2000). Referred to variously as a project support office, project management working group, project management office, strategic project office, project management center of excellence, and project management community of practice, these are organizations formed explicitly for the purpose of focusing on how project management is/can/should be practiced within the organization. My ideal project management council is comprised entirely of motivated project management practitioners who have volunteered for the assignment. They are experienced, visionary, change agents. As thought leaders they know how project management is done and how it should be done. They care deeply about their chosen profession and are concerned with the well-being of other project managers.

A project management council can and should serve as a link between project managers and executives. Sizing it to no more than about a dozen people, having it chaired and/or sanctioned by an executive, and limiting its authority will help it gain recognition for the good it can do and help it counter many of the stereotypical negatives associated with groups of this type that exist outside the formal organization chart. Having it focus broadly on the entire organizational system as it relates to projects and project management raises its bona fides. Having it make

recommendations to executives and provide help with implementing the executive actions positions it to have enduring value. Precluding it from control over decisions and resources minimizes the possibility that it will be viewed as a threat to established organizational decision making mechanisms. Limiting the term of its members to a year or possibly two will ensure a constant flow of fresh perspectives and ideas. Chartering the project management council to identify the barriers to project success and to make recommendations to overcome these barriers and then giving it the latitude to explore the paths that follow will invigorate its members as well as the organization.

## Conclusion

### Progress Is Incremental And Cumulative

Victory, when it comes to getting executives to act for project success, is incremental and cumulative. It does not come all at once, and it does not occur in all elements or all executives of the organization at the same pace. Since by definition we are dealing with behavior and change, we must recognize that we are dealing with what is usually a slow evolution rather than a sudden revolution. Executives and organizations have spent years becoming who they are. The good news is that the cumulative effects of modestly paced, genuine change in an executive and in an organization is enduring. The project manager who understands the changing definition of project success and who understands the critical dependent relationship necessary with the executive has joined the evolution. The project manager who tailors the actions for their executive to take based on the existing barriers has moved the evolution forward. The project manager who develops and uses sources of power and who takes the bold step of forming a project management council has accomplished a successful evolution not only for themselves but also for the organization and executives as well.

## References

- Archibald, R. (2003) *Managing High-Technology Programs & Projects*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bolles, D. (2002) *Building Project Management Centers of Excellence*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Bridges, D. & Crawford, K. (2000, September) *How to Startup and Rollout a Project Office*. PMI Annual Seminars & Symposium 2000, Houston, TX.
- Buckingham, M. & Coffman, C. (1999) *First Break All The Rules: What The World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Campbell, G. (2007, October) *Managing Senior Executives*. PMI Global Congress 2007, Atlanta, GA.
- Center for Business Practices. (2003) *The Value of Project Management Training*. Havertown, PA: Center for Business Practices.
- Charan, R., & Colvin, G. (1999, June) Why CEOs Fail. *Fortune Magazine*.
- Cooper, R. (2001) *Winning At New Products: Accelerating The Process From Idea To Launch*. New York, NY: Perseus Publishing.
- Crawford, J. (2002) *Project Management Maturity Model: Providing a Proven Path to Project Management Excellence*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker Inc.
- Crawford, J. (2002) *The Strategic Project Office*. New York, NY: Marcel Dekker Inc.
- Crowe, A. (2006) *Alpha Project Managers: What The Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not*. Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach.
- Dai, C. (2002, October) *The Role of the Project Management Office in Achieving Project Success*. PMI Annual Seminars & Symposium 2002, San Antonio, TX.
- Englund, R., & Bucero, A. (2006) *Project Sponsorship*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Englund, R., Graham, R. & Dinsmore, C. (2003) *Creating The Project Office*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Graham, R., & Englund, R. (1997) *Creating An Environment For Successful Projects*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Greenleaf, R. & Covey, S. (2002) *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Hass, K. (2007, October) *Living on the edge: Project Complexity Management*. PMI Global Congress 2007, Atlanta, GA.

- Heerkens, G. (2000, September) *How To Implement Project Management In Any Organization*. PMI Annual Seminars & Symposium 2000, Houston, TX.
- Ibbs, C. & Kwak, Y. (1997) *The Benefits Of Project Management*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Ibbs, W., & Reginato, J. (2002) *Quantifying The Value Of Project Management*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Kerzner, H. (1998) *In Search of Excellence in Project Management*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Kerzner, H. (2001) *Strategic Planning For Project Management Using A Project Management Maturity Model*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kloppenborg, T., Resch, D., Manolis, C & Heilkamp, M. (2006, August) An Empirical Investigation of the Sponsor's Role in Project Initiation. *RedOrbit*.
- Mauer, R. (1996) *Beyond The Wall Of Resistance*. Austin, TX: Bard Books Inc.
- O'Brochta, M. (2002, October) *Project Success – What Are the Criteria and Whose Opinion Counts*. PMI Annual Seminars & Symposium 2002, San Antonio, TX.
- O'Brochta, M. (2006, February-May) *Interviews With CIA Project Management Executives*, Washington D.C.: Unpublished.
- Pennypacker, J. (2002) *Justifying the Value of Project Management*. Havertown, PA: Center for Business Practices.
- Peters, T. (1999, April) The Wow Project. *FastCompany*.
- Pinto, J. (1996) *Power & Politics in Project Management*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Project Management Institute (1997) *Best Practices Of Project Management Groups In Large Functional Organizations*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Project Management Institute. (2004) *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®) (Third Edition)*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Project Management Institute. (2006) *The Standard for Program Management - First Edition*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Project Management Institute. (2008) *Membership Statistics*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Project Management World. (2003) *Study of the Acceptance of Project Management*. Markham, ON: Project Management World.
- Rad, P. & Levin, G. (2002) *The Advanced Project Management Office*. Boca Raton, FL: St. Lucie Press.
- Schneidmuller, J. & Balaban, J. (2000, September) *From Project Management Council to Center of Excellence: The Journey Continues...* PMI Annual Seminars & Symposium 2000, Houston, TX.
- The Standish Group (2006) *Chaos Report 2006*. West Yarmouth, MA: The Standish Group.
- Thomas, J., Delisle, C. & Jugdev, K. (2002) *Selling Project Management To Senior Executives*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Towers Perrin. (2008) *Global Workforce Study*. Valhalla, NY: Towers Perrin.
- Verma, V. (1995) *Organizing Projects For Success: The Human Aspects of Project Management (Volume One)*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.
- Whitten, N. (2002, December) Duties of the Effective Project Sponsor. *PM Network*.