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Program Manager Competencies (Chapter 11 of Program Management for Improved Business Results)

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Chapter 11

Program Manager Competencies

What was your motivation for choosing program management for developing products? We posed that question to Gary Rosen, corporate vice president for Applied Materials Corporation. Rosen responded by stating the following:

> When observing the differences between poorly run product development efforts and well-run efforts, I noticed the difference was that the well-run programs had a true program manager in charge. These people had a broad skill base that is needed—good people skills, good business acumen, and good system skills. Unfortunately, not a lot of people have these broad skills.

Given the roles and responsibilities of the program manager discussed in Chapter 10, it is a rare program manager that comes to these roles totally qualified to meet all the skills and competencies required. The successful program manager is constantly seeking to learn and broaden his or her knowledge and experience in order to take on more complex and critical programs. Senior management in turn needs to create a positive learning environment to encourage program managers to continually seek improvement and growth.

We developed the program management competency model in order to address the breadth, depth, and complexity of the program management role. The model provides senior management with an excellent aid to assist an organization in developing program management as a true discipline that can provide value through increasing the likelihood of successfully achieving intended business results. The more experienced and capable program managers are, the greater the probability that they will successfully deliver the business goals of the firm.

In this chapter we use the program management competency model to detail the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for program managers to continually grow as professionals and consistently succeed in their role. Additionally, we discuss the key organizational enablers needed to make the competency model fully effective and to adequately support the program management discipline within an organization.

THE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY MODEL

The program management competency model has been designed to provide the knowledge, skills, and abilities to systematically support the recruiting, staffing, professional development, and career planning of the program manager (see "What Is Competence?"). The information presented in this section has been derived from companies that use program management as a true discipline and business function. Although the technical aspects of developing a new capability or transforming an organization are critically important, much of the success of a program is behavioral and human-oriented in nature.

A vice president and general manager for a major U.S.-based defense contractor underscored this assertion when describing to us the critical skills needed for a program manager:

> A couple years ago I would have started this discussion with the need for a program manager to have strong technical skills. Now that I truly understand the role of the program manager I wouldn't include technical skills. More important is a program manager's sense of maturity in dealing with people who have differing expectations—the customer, senior managers, and the program team.

What Is Competence?

The word *competence* means the ability to do something well. With respect to management, we found that the term is highly overdefined. Take, for example, the following definitions:[1]

"An underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image (or social role), or a body of knowledge that he or she uses." While comprehensive, this definition may not be very user-friendly or practical.

"The characteristics of a manager that leads to the demonstration of skills and abilities and results in effective performance within an occupational area." We find this definition more practical in nature, but it doesn't address the fact that

competent managers need a strong knowledge base to effectively apply their skills and abilities.

"The knowledge, skills, and qualities of effective managers used to effectively perform the functions associated with management in the work situation." We feel this definition best describes the competencies needed by practicing program managers.

While there are many more definitions, we feel the final definition above best describes the competencies needed by program managers to effectively manage complex and demanding programs in the contemporary business environment. A simple algorithm sums it up best:

Competence = Knowledge + Skills + Personal Qualities + Experience

The objective of the program management competency model is to provide a set of competency criteria that can be used for the continued development and career growth of program managers. The four competency areas in Figure 11.1 are mutually dependent on one another for achieving overall performance success. It is the interworking of all of these competencies together that drive the synergy of the model. It is also important to note that the competencies discussed apply to program managers who lead either co-located teams or geographically distributed teams.

Many program managers come to the role by way of having a successful track record as a project manager. One aspect from the summary view of the core competency model is that project management is but one element of the program management discipline. This underscores the discussion in Chapter 1 that showed the distinction between program management and project management. One can visualize from Figure 11.1 that program management encompasses a broader role than project management. In addition to strong project management skills, the successful program
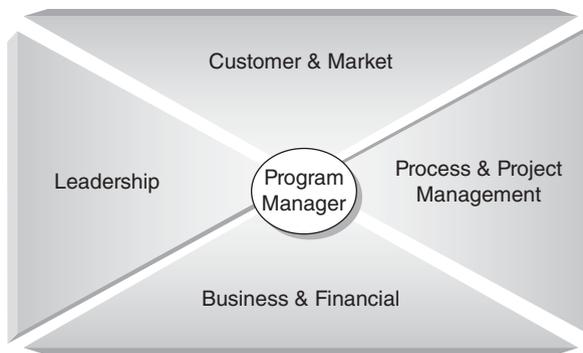

Figure 11.1   Program management competency areas.

manager needs to gain proficiency in broad-based leadership, business and financial, customer and market, and other process competencies. Without this added proficiency, the transition from a project management role to a program management role is many times frustrating for the individual, the organization, and the customer.

When detail is added to each of the competency areas, the core skills of the program manager emerge. The following sections provide that detail for each of the four program management competency areas.

CUSTOMER AND MARKET COMPETENCIES

Customer and market competency involves having a full understanding of the markets a company serves and how an organization's capabilities are being utilized by the customer and end user. It should be noted that we use the term *market* to describe either the external or internal market. The better the program manager and his or her team can closely align the capability under development or the organizational transition end state with the customer's needs, the more it will enhance the potential for customer satisfaction and the successful achievement of the business results intended. Critical skills in which the program manager should gain proficiency within the customer and market core competency are shown in Figure 11.2.

Customer & Market
Broad market knowledge
Knowledge of customer needs and application
Commitment to customer satisfaction
Systems thinking
Champion for quality

Leadership
Core leadership skills
Influencing skills
Facilitation skills
Ability to prioritize work
Emotional Intelligence
Virtual management skills
Effective communication
Political acumen

Program Manager

Process & Project Management
Process proficiency
Life cycle management
Project management basics
Stakeholder management

Business & Financial
Business fundamentals
Ability to think strategically
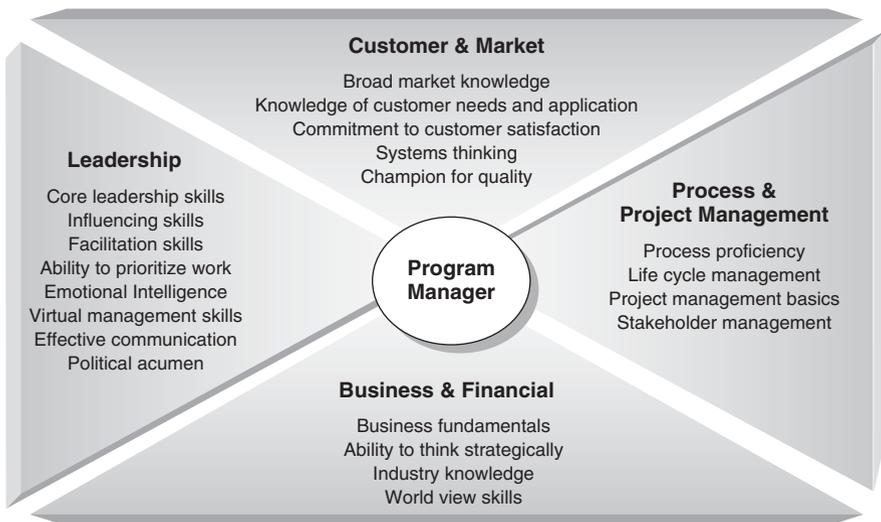Industry knowledge
World view skills

Figure 11.2   Critical program management skills.

Customer and market competency means that the program manager has a comprehensive understanding of the market or organization into which the program output will be deployed, the types of customers, the competitors, and the general attributes and trends in the market. More broadly speaking, the program manager should possess a working knowledge of the key technologies that a firm's solutions are based upon, as well as the future trends within their industry.

New capabilities and solutions are successful when they have been designed to directly meet the application needs of the customer base. Today it is common to have key customers participate in the development process. Therefore, the program manager should be knowledgeable and sufficiently skilled to incorporate the valuable input of the customer into the program management process—what some call *customer intimacy*. Customer intimacy is all about understanding what the customer really wants and needs. This intimate knowledge of your customer is critical to maintaining a good working relationship with your key customers and end users (see "Do You Know What Your Customers Really Want?").

Do You Know What Your Customers Really Want?

Program engineers at Accuracy Inc. were proud that they practiced the concept of customer intimacy, and, as they put it, "It showed in their practice." They saw customer intimacy as the ability of their product development teams to recognize, internalize, and build the customer's needs into their customized interconnecting cable products. To check how much they were "customer intimate," they were advised to design and administer a survey that would ask 36 customers how satisfied they were with Accuracy's performance. The survey identified 15 dimensions of customer intimacy, which included, for example, the quality of the joint product definition process, quality of the rapid prototyping development process, ability to manage product changes, adherence to program milestones, and adherence to the final delivery date. For ratings, the survey used the following scale: 1-poor, 2-fair, 3-good, 4-very good, and 5-great.

On 2 of the 15 dimensions, Accuracy Inc. received very good ratings or higher for adherence to the final delivery date and program milestones. The remaining 13 dimensions revealed average ratings below 3, of which most dimensions were rated about 2, or fair. As he looked at these ratings, the director of product development wondered if his group was really "customer intimate." What do you think?

In program management, delivering the whole solution (Chapter 4) is a primary means to achieving customer satisfaction. The program manager

needs to be able to demonstrate a commitment to the customer and demonstrate knowledge of customer application and needs. Those skilled in systems thinking can view projects and activities from a broad perspective that includes seeing overall characteristics and patterns rather than just individual elements. By focusing on the entirety of the program, or in essence the system aspects of the program (inputs, outputs, and interrelationships), the program manager improves the probability of delivering the whole solution and meeting the expectations of the customer. This involves the ability to see the big picture, crossing boundaries, and being able to combine disparate elements into a holistic entity. Usually this ability resides in people with very diverse backgrounds, multi-disciplined minds, and a broad spectrum of experiences.[2]

The program manager, as the quality champion for his or her program's customers, needs to ensure the program results meet or exceed the quality expectations of the customer. The program manager should possess a bias for action, be able to think globally, and assure that quality, reliability, manufacturability, serviceability, and regulatory compliance objectives are achieved.

BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL COMPETENCIES

To be successful from a business perspective, the program manager must possess sufficient business skills to understand the organization's business model and financial goals. This requires that a program manager has the ability to develop a comprehensive program business case that supports the company's objectives and strategies, the ability to manage the program within the business aspects of the company, and the ability to understand and analyze the related financial measures pertaining to the program. The areas in which the program manager should gain proficiency in order to effectively manage the business of a program are shown in Figure 11.2.

When operating in the role of the business manager proxy, the program manager must possess the core business acumen needed to manage the business aspects of a program as detailed in Chapter 10:

- Aligning a program to business strategy
- Creating and managing to the business case
- Managing business risk
- Monitoring customers and the market

- Managing intellectual property
- Managing program resources

Other business fundamentals include capabilities in financial analysis and accounting, international management, economics, law and ethics, resource management, negotiation, and communication. This implies that there is also a solid understanding regarding the integration of these elements and related impact on one another.

The program manager is required to think strategically in order to align the program and its constituent projects to the strategic business goals of the organization. This includes understanding how a firm or organization performs strategic planning and its relationship to portfolio planning and be able to separate aspects of strategic thinking from tactical and operational elements as the need arises. A part of strategic thinking involves a basic understanding of the industry in which a business operates and how the firm's strategy fits with the direction of the industry long term.

Industry trends, knowledge about competitors, and supply chain implications are a fundamental part of keeping a program viable from a business perspective. The program manager should possess a strong business sense and integrative capability to successfully manage the broad array of strategic, business, and financial attributes related to his or her specific program and how these pertain to the industry the organization serves.

As previously mentioned, much of the work we do today is performed across national boundaries. Therefore, the program manager must possess a world view of his or her role and be knowledgeable and understand the global and local site environment including the social, political, and economic trends in order to be successful. This should also include a specific working knowledge of the local site and international economics and business requirements under which the program is operating. The world view capability is significantly enhanced if a program manager has had earlier experience and exposure to various international cultures and markets through earlier work assignments or extended visits.

PROCESS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES

A program manager should be well versed in core organizational processes and project management competencies, and be able to abstract the

competences for use at the program management level. The program manager needs to be competent in processes to handle program level issues. Also, both the program manager and the project managers on the program must possess operational competencies, including project management methods and tools, to effectively manage the operational elements of the program. The areas in which the program manager should gain process and project management proficiency are shown in Figure 11.2.

An important aspect of this core skill set is that of becoming proficient at possessing a solid working knowledge of the specific processes and practices of the company, knowing how things get done, the policies and procedures that must be adhered to, and who must be involved to approve various aspects of the program. If it is a product-based company, for example, the program manager must be thoroughly familiar with the firm's new development processes to ensure that the program adheres to the company's requirements and expectations as to how products are designed and built. The program manager that develops this competency will increase his or her probability of gaining team members' confidence and trust. They will become confident that their leader knows how to get things done in a timely and successful manner.

A challenge in leading a program team becomes one of ensuring that all members of the team are consistently following the same processes and methods, and are using the same tools when appropriate. A foundational element in driving process consistency is to ensure that a common life cycle and decision framework (Chapter 6) is being used by all. This will help to drive common language and terminology, establish a common cadence of activities, and provide common decision and synchronization points throughout the program cycle.

Project management skills are primarily determined by the particular methodology or methodologies used on a program (PMI's *PMBOK*®, PRINCE2, or Agile for example). The program manager must be able to apply the methodology and at times be able to apply multiple methodologies at the program level. Each methodology provides key information and understanding that both project managers and program managers should master in order to possess the highest probability of success in achieving the objectives and expectations of their customers and management. When it comes to project management competencies, the program manager role has many similarities to that of the project manager with the key added dimension of leading and integrating the work being done by multiple projects simultaneously.

Stakeholder management skills are critical for program manager success. The program manager first must know how to determine the organizational landscape in which the program is to operate. He or she will likely have many stakeholders both internal and external to the organization who need to be influenced (see "Even a Salad Vendor May Be a Stakeholder"). Good stakeholder management first of all involves understanding who the program stakeholders are and their needs, understanding the level of influence each stakeholder has on the program, and understanding their allegiance and attitude toward the program (never assume all stakeholders want the program to succeed). From this information, the program manager can determine which stakeholders he or she needs to manage and develop a stakeholder influencing strategy (Chapter 7). The program manager must then be able to use and extend this knowledge to develop the ability to choose the right mode of communication to address customers, senior management, team members, suppliers, and others. This involves knowing when to see people face to face, when to send messages, and when to avoid them altogether.

Even a Salad Vendor May Be a Stakeholder

This is a bizarre example of what can happen if a comprehensive stakeholder analysis is not conducted on a program. The program involved a fast-track transfer of manufacturing technology from Europe to a Middle East country. Just after the beginning of the program, the program manager got a call from a vendor claiming that all roads leading to his office were blocked by groups of violent people. As a result, some important computer equipment couldn't be delivered. A quick check proved this call correct. The people were local butterhead salad farmers who were unhappy that the foreign contractor was importing salad from Europe, rather than buying it from them. The siege went on for days and the delivery delays were impacting the program schedule. Finally, the program manager figured out his mistake—one cannot ignore the relationship with local communities that have a big stake in the program. In this case the salad farmers were part of the local community, and therefore stakeholders in the program. Once the oversight was discovered, the contractor began buying local salad and program deliveries proceeded without delays.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Leadership competencies are how we describe the "people skills" program managers need to be successful in leading a team of people. Leadership

competencies involve those that are needed to effectively lead multiple cross-disciplined project teams that are a part of the program. This pertains to both co-located teams as well as in highly distributed or virtual teams. Specifically, we are referring to organizational leadership competencies. The areas in which the program manager should gain leadership proficiency in order to effectively lead a program team are shown in Figure 11.2.

Core Leadership Skills

First and foremost, a program manager needs to have the capability to build, coalesce, and champion the team to deliver solutions that will satisfy the company's goals and customer's needs. The foundational elements of effective team leadership apply whether one is leading a domestic team that is co-located in a single site or a global team that is distributed across multiple countries. Success begins with the core principles of team leadership, as discussed in Chapter 10:

- Creating a common purpose
- Establishing team chemistry
- Building and sustaining trust
- Demonstrating personal integrity
- Empowering the team
- Driving participation, collaboration, and integration
- Communicating effectively
- Managing team conflict
- Making tough decisions
- Providing recognition and rewards

Influencing

In today's organizations, members of a program team rarely report directly to the program manager. This requires the program manager to become proficient in influencing the actions of the team and stakeholders. Influencing traits of a strong program manager include being socially adept in interacting with others in any given situation, having the ability to assess all aspects of information and behavior without passing judgment or injecting bias, and being able to effectively communicate your point of view to change opinion or change course of action. As John Maxwell states in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, "Leadership is

influence—nothing more, nothing less. If you don't have influence, you will *never* be able to lead others."[3]

Facilitation

Simply put, facilitation is the act of assisting team members to reach their collective goals by helping to make team communication and collaboration easier and more effective. Good facilitation skills help to ensure that relationships between team members continue to develop and that ongoing communication and collaboration between team members is occurring as needed—productively. Core facilitation skills include the ability to draw out varying opinions and viewpoints among team members, to create a discussion and collaboration framework consisting of a clear end state and decision and collaboration boundaries, and to summarize and synthesize details into useful information and strategy. Other beneficial facilitation skills include using personal energy to maintain forward momentum, being able to rationalize cause and effect, helping team members to establish one-on-one relationships, and keeping team members focused on the primary topics of discussion and collaboration.

Since a significant amount of communication and collaboration between team members occurs in team meetings, the program manager has to develop skills in planning and conducting effective meetings. Team meetings will vary from face-to-face meetings phone conferences video conferences, Internet-based data sharing meetings, or some combination of all of these. This involves preplanning an agenda with time-boxed topics, sending any materials that will be used in the meeting to all members prior to the meeting, setting the meeting ground rules, facilitating the discussion appropriately to ensure a mutual understanding of all conversations, and periodically checking to see if quiet members are understanding the discussion and are fully engaged.

Prioritization of Work

Effective program managers are continually prioritizing their work and the work of their team to achieve the greatest return from the actions of the team. There is an enormous opportunity for the program team to spend too much time on work that is of little value due to the complexity and scale of most programs. Prioritization of work begins with validation of the core assumptions driving the direction of the program with the

primary stakeholders and program governance body. If the assumptions behind the priorities are incorrect, it is quite possible that the priorities themselves will be incorrect.[4] For example, if cost containment is the highest priority of the program, then the program manager must be emphatic about staying within the financial constraints. If technological leadership is the highest priority, the program manager will need to keep the team focused on the technical aspects of the program. The ability of the program manager to focus the work of the project teams on the highest priority needs of the program is crucial for maintaining a high level of team priority.

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman described emotional intelligence as "managing with heart."[5] Emotional intelligence skills involve being acutely in tune and sensitive to emotional responses of program team members. Emotional intelligence skills consist of two types of competencies: personal competence and social competence. Personal competence involves both self-awareness and self-management, where self-awareness is one's ability to accurately perceive one's own emotions and moods in the moment and understand one's tendencies in various situations. Self-management is the ability to use awareness of emotions to stay flexible and direct one's behavior positively. Thus, self-awareness involves staying on top of one's reactions to team members and others and managing one's own emotional self-regulation to think before one acts or reacts. Social competence includes social awareness and relationship management skills that drive at understanding others and managing relationships.

Social awareness is one's ability to accurately pick up on the emotions of others and to understand what is really going on with them whether one agrees with them or not. In essence, it is applying empathy and appropriately understanding and reacting to the emotional needs of others.

Virtual Team Leadership

Today's business models have created additional team building challenges for program managers (see "Virtual, Discontinuous, and Condensed Team Building"). It is common for program team members to be distributed across multiple countries. Skills for managing virtual teams (non-co-located teams) have become an emerging critical skill for program

managers.[6] There are many aspects to successfully leading a geographically distributed (virtual) team. We will cover a few of the most critical.

Virtual, Discontinuous, and Condensed Team Building

True program leaders forge the vision for the team, evangelically communicate it, and inspire and motivate team members to follow them. All this is typically associated with leading a single program at a time in a co-located manner. But business models of today have brought new leadership challenges for program managers, including leadership of virtual programs and simultaneous leadership of multiple programs.

The first challenge, leading virtual program teams, raises the following question: Is it possible to build true leadership in virtual teams when members are geographically, culturally, organizationally, and time zone dispersed? Patrick Little, a senior IT program manager for a leading research hospital, answered that question this way:

Leading a virtual team is possible, but it takes additional effort from all members of the team. Our virtual program team has an assigned program leader, me, but leadership roles are shared within the team. Leadership responsibilities include motivating, information- and opinion-seeking, mediation, facilitating communication, removing barriers, lubricating interfaces, and making each conflict functional so it could be used to improve the quality of our decisions. All these aspects are important for building team spirit. However, doing this in a distributed team structure requires a lot of travel on my part. Frankly, I am on the road all of the time.

The second challenge, leading multiple simultaneous programs, is equally difficult. In a classic situation of leading a single program at a time, program managers can focus on leading a single team without needing to split their time and effort between multiple program teams. Because program managers managing multiple programs need to build multiple teams concurrently, their time for each team is limited. Consequently, they need to apply a condensed, fast team-building method. Similarly, they are expected to operate in a discontinuous manner—lead one team, discontinue, and then lead another team.

As business models continue to change, so do program management practices and competencies. And as managing programs become more complex, we find that program management core competencies expand to adjust to the complexity to continually provide improved business results.

Many virtual teams are multi-cultural entities due to geographic distribution. Competence at cross-cultural management is critical in leading teams in a geographically distributed environment. Cross-cultural management includes awareness of cultures you are directly involved in and

understanding attitudes, differences, and behaviors. Its focus is toward improving the interaction and working relationship between team members, management, and suppliers from all the cultures represented in the direct and broader team. It requires program managers to examine their own biases and prejudices, develop cross-cultural skills, and when possible, observe and learn from culturally proficient role models. Only through understanding and appreciating the unique characteristics of their culture can the program manager show the proper level of respect and understanding that each team member deserves.

Effective Communication

Communicating in a virtual environment requires us to broaden our perspective and appreciation for the entire communication process due to the comprehensive set of challenges facing the exchange of meaning. Communication is any behavior another person perceives and interprets as the understanding of what was meant. It includes sending both verbal messages (words) and nonverbal messages (tone of voice, facial expressions, behaviors). Communication therefore involves a complex multi-layered and dynamic process through which we exchange meaning.[7]

Communication on a virtual team is complicated by the physical separation of team members and the resulting reliance upon technologies to facilitate team communication. The global team leader needs to develop skills in selecting the appropriate communication technologies given the tasks required, technical competence of the team members, and infrastructure capabilities within the geographies where team members reside.[8]

Effective communication requires the ability to speak multiple disciplinary languages—business language when communicating with senior management, user language when communicating with the customer, technology language when communicating with technologists, and so on. Effective communication skills also mean that the program manager should be able to actively listen and provide clarity in difficult situations, many times serving as the translator in multidisciplinary discussions.

Rick Nardizzi, a senior program manager, told us a story of why the second program he managed was a major failure (his first program was very successful):

> Because of the success I had with my first program, I thought I knew all the answers on the second program and stopped listening to what was being said to me by the program team. I listened to what I wanted to hear

versus what they were really telling me. I wasn't looking for problems, even though they were being communicated to me by my team. Eventually, the problems became insurmountable and I was removed from the program manager position.

Political Acumen

Finally, it is important that the program manager possess both a keen understanding of the organization and have political savvy to effectively leverage and influence the power base of the company. Company politics are a natural part of any organization, and the program manager should understand that politics is a behavioral aspect of program management that he or she must contend with in order to succeed. The key is to not be naïve and to understand that not every program stakeholder sees great value in the program. A program manager must be politically sensible by being sensitive to the interests of the most powerful stakeholders, and at the same time, demonstrate good judgment by acting with integrity. The program manager must actively manage the politics surrounding his or her program to protect against negative effects of political maneuvering on the part of stakeholders and to exploit politically advantageous situations. In order to do this, it is important that the program manager possess both a keen understanding of the organization and the political savvy necessary to build strong relationships to effectively leverage and influence the power base of the company.

An effective method for working within the political environment of an organization is to leverage the powerful members of one's network. One's ability to network successfully across hierarchical and organizational boundaries is a tremendously useful skill. Networking involves becoming skilled in decision making by knowing how to determine the right parties to be involved in program decisions, understanding the impacts of a decision, and developing the appropriate messaging for the decision at hand. From a team perspective, effective networking skills give the program manager the ability to create a sense of urgency in team members who are potentially isolated from the rest of the team or are being pulled toward other competing priorities.

ALIGNING SKILLS TO ORGANIZATIONAL NEED

Throughout this book we use the program management continuum as a model to demonstrate the various ways in which program management is

implemented in organizations. In Figure 10.1 the continuum was used to show how the roles of the program manager will vary depending upon how program management is implemented within an organization. In turn, the skills and competencies of a company's program managers need to align with how program management is implemented and the roles they are expected to perform.

If, for example, a firm uses program management as an administrative or facilitative function, the program managers will operate in primarily an administrative and coordination manner. The skills required for this role do not include all four competency areas of the program management competency model. Process and project management skills will be required along with some core leadership skills.

However, if this same firm wants to transform their program management discipline into an integration or business management function, their program managers will need to fulfill significantly different roles which require additional skills and competencies. Figure 11.3 illustrates this need. As the responsibilities of a program manager expand, so too must their skills and competencies. It is important to note that the skills are cumulative as one transitions to the right of the program management continuum.

Richard Vander Meere, Vice President of Global Program Management, described the top four skills needed for the program managers at Frog (a product strategy and design consultancy firm):

1. Emotional intelligence: Being able to read people and how they are reacting to a given situation
2. Project basics: Developing program scope, budget, and schedule and then managing to them
3. Savvy: Hearing, listening, and being able to quickly decide when to jump in and when to sit back
4. Influencing: Having the ability to step up in a room full of strong personalities and have a voice that affects the outcome of a situation

According to Richard, how program managers present themselves is also key:

It is important to be able to deliver a difficult message and get results without damaging your relationships.

As the leaders of an organization staff their program management positions, they must do so by being mindful of the type of skills and

	Operational Support Role		Leadership & Business Role	
Customer & Market	None	Minimal • Customer coordination • Quality assurance	Basic • System thinking • Customer needs assessment • Customer satisfaction	Significant • Broad market knowledge • Systems thinking • Customer needs assessment • Customer satisfaction
Business & Financial	None	Minimal • Budget tracking • Expenditure tracking • Earned value	Basic • Overall cost performance • ROI evaluation • Business case creation • Earned value	Significant • Business fundamentals • Strategic Thinking • Broad industry knowledge • Manage with a world view
Process & Project Management	Minimal • Process knowledge • Team coordination • Project management basics • Technical knowledge	Basic • Process knowledge • Project management acumen • Technical knowledge	Significant • Process proficiency • Project management proficiency • Integration proficiency • Stakeholder influencing	Basic • Process proficiency • Project management basics • Integration proficiency • Stakeholder proficiency
Leadership	None	Minimal • Basic team building • Facilitation proficiency • Influencing ability • Communication basics	Basic • Core leadershio acumen • Influencing proficiency • Communication proficiency • Virtual management ability	Significant • Core leadership proficiency • Prioritization proficiency • Virtual management acumen • Political savvy

Figure 11.3   Expanding skills and competencies for expanded roles.

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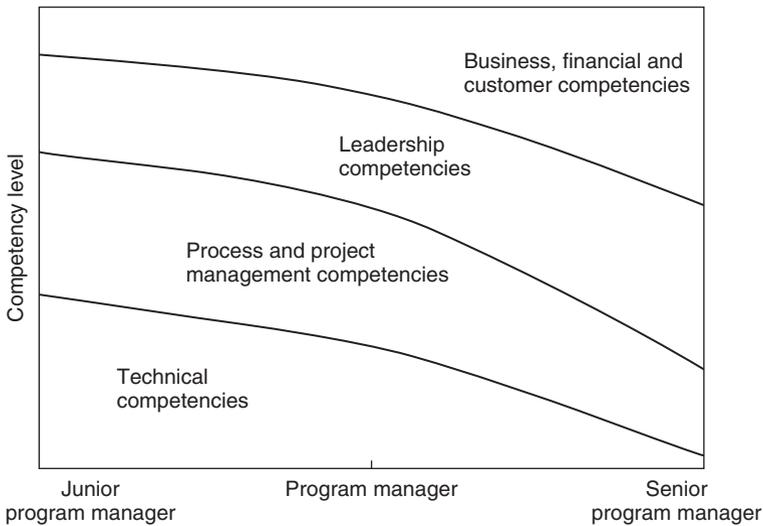
Figure 11.4   The competency—maturity mix.

experience required based upon how their program management discipline is being implemented. For example, as demonstrated in Figure 11.4, junior program managers typically have higher levels of technical competency and lower levels of business and leadership competency. This is mainly because junior program managers are commonly promoted from a specialty function or the project management ranks to lead a program. They have not yet had the time or experience leading larger, more business significant programs to hone their business and leadership competencies.

In contrast, senior program managers who lead larger and more complex programs have typically not been involved in solving specific technical problems for a period of time; therefore, they are unable to maintain their technical competency. Rather, long exposure to business, financial, and customer affairs help the managers polish these competencies.

Generally, direct technical skills become less important as the program manager takes on larger, more complex programs. He or she then delegates management of the technical aspects of the program to the project managers but may intervene on a technical issue if it becomes a barrier to the success of the program. The need for business, financial, market, and leadership competencies grows as program managers face more complex and strategically important programs.

Process and project management competencies are somewhat different. Junior program managers have modest competencies of this type because

they normally have project management experience within the company prior to taking on program management assignments. As their maturity and experience grows in the program management discipline, process and project management competencies become less significant, and more focus is applied to the business management and team leadership aspects of program management.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The knowledge, skills, and abilities described as part of the program management competency model are most useful for growing and developing the firm's program managers, once they are hired. This is important because future gains are made through a model of continual improvement in performance. Of course, much of what the program managers will learn will come from on-the-job training while running their programs. However, in order to further broaden their capabilities and achieve the potential of the individual, it is helpful if an organization invests in continual improvement in their discipline.

Many program managers are in the discipline because they enjoy the role and want to make it their career. Most highly effective program managers are self-motivated and demonstrate a desire to self-assess, take on a philosophy of continued improvement in their growth and responsibility, and are persistent in attainment of their personal objectives. In doing so, they may pursue growth and advancement opportunities within their company, which is important for the long-term viability of the firm.

As stated earlier, it is rare that program managers come in to the role fully proficient in all competency areas. The program management competency model has been used by companies as the guideline for continual career development of their program managers. Ongoing dialogue between the program manager and his or her direct manager should be focused (in part) on understanding the program manager's growth and career aspirations and balancing that with management's short- and long-term performance expectations of the individual. The results from this exercise serve as the basis for an individual development plan over a given period of time for the program manager (annually in most cases). It is a process of targeting where the individual currently is in their performance and capability, where they want to be in their career at some

time in the future, and then developing a plan on how to get there. The specifics of the plan may include some or all of the following:

Internal training courses. Some firms offer their own training modules for the program manager. These may be web-based and available to the entire population of the company regardless of location.

External training seminars and courses. Many professional organizations and consulting firms offer a variety of courses. However, good courses focused on program management are few and difficult to find. (See www.programmanagement-academy.com).

College-degree programs. Undergraduate and graduate programs at some colleges and universities offer selected course material that can be very useful to practicing program managers.

Industry certifications. Professional organizations such as the Project Management Institute are now offering knowledge-based certifications in program management.

On-the-job training and experience. Hands-on experience is one of the most effective techniques for broadening the capability of a program manager.

Mentoring relationships. Newer program managers can gain much knowledge and capability enhancement by being mentored by an experienced program manager.

It is essential that managers give attention to issues of career paths, education and training, and in general, the development of human resources in the organization.[9] If a company does not provide an established career path for the program manager, then a program manager's best chance for advancement within his or her discipline may be pursuing more senior-level positions in other companies. For companies that have a program management office, program manager career development should be a core responsibility of the office.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS

No amount of program management knowledge, skill, experience, or training can compensate for serious organizational barriers that impede

program success. Even the most skilled and knowledgeable program managers will likely fail unless the barriers and impediments are appropriately addressed within an enterprise.

It is worth repeating that senior managers of an organization play a critical role in enabling their program managers to consistently succeed. Organizational enablers are things that create or proactively encourage a positive environment to provide the maximum opportunity for success, learning, and growth to occur in program management. Enablers range from environmental factors to organizational and managerial culture, philosophy, and actions. Examples of enablers would include clear roles and responsibilities defined for those involved in the program management discipline and stable systems that can accurately and consistently measure program status and results. Other examples of organizational enablers include the following:

Enabler 1: Structure

The organization needs to be structured appropriately to enhance cross-organization collaboration. Additionally, to facilitate alignment of business strategy and execution output, a firm should be structured so that senior management and a program manager have direct access to each other to work together as a leadership team.

Enabler 2: A Systematic Management Model

This enabler involves the adoption by senior management of an integrated management system (Chapter 3) that aligns execution output directly to business strategies and goals. The model should be sufficiently broad based to enable focus on a holistic solution for the customer or client, and all elements are synchronized over the program cycle.

Enabler 3: Empowerment

Program managers need to be formally empowered by senior management with the appropriate level of authority and decision responsibility pertinent to their role as program managers. Transfer of power further enables program managers to transfer appropriate decision-making capability to team members at the local level, as appropriate, where the best information and knowledge about the program may exist.

Enabler 4: Processes

A set of formal processes and procedures with appropriate decision checkpoints along with other pertinent company policies should be

established and consistently applied. This will ensure that cross-discipline work effort is in compliance with all requirements and provides an effective means for mitigating business and operational risk.

Enabler 5: Tools

Appropriate electronic communication and collaboration tools need to be in place and available for virtual communication and collaboration. These tools need to be supported by consistent procedures and team norms in order to optimize communication and the flow of information across all sites and team members.

Enabler 6: Formal Escalation Process

Processes need to be established to elevate barriers and issues outside the control of the program manager to senior management in order to get timely resolution. This also involves a system of documented success criteria, targets, and measures to indicate when escalation is needed and when it is not.

Enabler 7: Career Development

The level of responsibility and accountability granted to the program manager requires a skill set that is much more comprehensive than the traditional project manager. Senior management needs to recognize the importance of continual improvement and growth in the capabilities of their program managers in order to add increased value to their organization, and invest in career development of their program managers.

Enabler 8: Rewards and Recognition

Human resource policies are needed to support team participation, including a reward and recognition system that is balanced and equitable. This entails a comprehensive approach that focuses on retaining key talent that goes beyond just monetary incentives to also include personal growth and job satisfaction.[10]

Enabler 9: Face-to-Face Investment

Investment must be made in face-to-face meetings that involve critical participants on a program. This will contribute to building trust among team members and form the foundation for ongoing working relationships, improved synergy, and positive team chemistry.

One executive who has experience implementing program management in several organizations is David Churchill, former vice president and general manager of the Network and Digital Solutions Business Unit of Agilent Technologies. Churchill described effective senior management philosophy in support of program management this way:

Organizations that recognize the strategic value of program management will do the following: treat program management as a critical talent and skill set and establish it as a functional discipline like engineering and marketing; elevate the program management function in stature and place it at the senior level in order to provide program managers the necessary level of influence across an organization; and empower program managers as leaders within the organization with sufficient authority to implement and achieve the intended business objectives.

Program Management in Practice

Surviving the Program from Hell

Contributed by Eddie R. Williams

Have you ever managed, or had turned over to you to manage, a *Program from Hell?* You know the kind: highly complex, with diverse stakeholders possessing egos and personal agendas, highly visible to senior executives, involving a huge investment of organizational resources and equally huge expectations, and usually way behind schedule, over budget, and those responsible are acting more like a loosely associated network of people rather than a high-performance team.

Often, the most complex programs are led by the most experienced and seasoned program managers. Sometimes, however, a program manager is thrust into a position to turn around a Program from Hell regardless of experience. Carl Hampton found himself in exactly that position with one exception. He wasn't asked to turn the program around, he was asked to terminate it. However, what was expected to be a sure failure and lost opportunity actually turned into a personal and organizational success. The following is Carl's story.

The Call to Action

Carl was a successful program manager. Over the last couple decades, he had the opportunity to manage several programs and projects, some more challenging than others. One particularly stands out and is now referred to as the Program from Hell.

Carl worked for Healthteq Corporation, a medium-sized software and products firm specializing in health and human services products and had just wrapped up the successful completion of a major program when he was called into the home office on Friday morning to meet with the

company's senior management team. During the meeting, Carl was presented the details of a program that was in trouble and was expected to fail. He was informed by management that there were initial overruns, communication issues, problems completing requirements definition, and uncontrolled changes introduced into the system. The result was summarized by one of the executives: "We have an unacceptable number of issues and defects, to the point we can't win with this solution."

It was also shared with him that there were problems between the client and certain program personnel. He was told he would be replacing the current program manager, William Nicks, who would be reassigned.

Carl was told that he was selected for this assignment because of his program management capabilities and more, specifically, his ability to manage relationships and his conflict management, negotiation, and communication skills. Carl had gained recognition for these skills because of his leadership and management on previous programs and projects. The management team acknowledged Carl's abilities, and indicated that this program required someone who was a "business and technical program manager; someone comfortable working with strong personalities on the business side and capable of leading a diverse team of project managers, technical leads, and managers."

The position change would be announced in a week, which gave Carl time to work with the current program manager regarding all matters pertaining to the transition. At the close of the meeting, the director of technology investments said, "Your primary goal here, Carl, is to gracefully terminate this program."

Carl had heard rumors that this program was in trouble. He did not know, however, that he would be asked to terminate the program and he now had concerns about doing so. He was having a great deal of success in his career, and didn't have any failed projects or programs as part of his resume. He wanted to keep it that way. However, being in the central office with the executive leaders in front of him, he said he would get on board and take a good look at the program. Before making plans for the program's termination, he would report back to the executive team in a week with a report on his findings and recommendations for next steps.

Taking a Look at Hades

Carl came on board the program the following Monday morning and met with William Nicks. Carl informed William that he would be conducting a program assessment that would entail interviewing client managers,

project team leads, and subject matter experts. The two reviewed the assessment together, which included the following nine points:

1. The contract, proposal, and statement of work
2. Client's business plans and strategies that the program supported
3. Program business case and any charters or briefings that existed
4. Financial expectations and budget reports relative to ROI expectations
5. Program deliverables, project plans, and schedules (plan versus actual)
6. Methodologies in use
7. Initial requirements documentation
8. Program and project status reports
9. Risks, communication, and security plans that existed

During the first week Carl was positioned as the co-program manager and introduced to management, clients, users, other stakeholders, and employees as appropriate. Healthteq management expected William to move on as soon as possible (both Carl and the management were working to help him do so). William worked with Carl to arrange pertinent meetings and to gather and share material needed for the assessment.

Throughout the assessment, all those interviewed were open and honest. However, tension was high among some managers and users on the program displayed some anger. The users, in particular, continually voiced their negative thoughts about the program. After the first two days, Carl could imagine how difficult the past couple of months must have been. He debriefed with William after the second day and said, "It's been a very uncomfortable week so far, and I understand that as the program manager, relationship and conflict management are now my responsibilities."

By the end of the week, after meetings with stakeholders and members of the program team, Carl had identified several issues, problems, and challenges. However, as he documented his findings and prepared his briefing for the executive team the following week, he became convinced that the program could be put back on track and deliver the desired business value rather than take the loss associated with terminating the program.

Carl detailed his thoughts and turn-around plan, arranged a meeting with his program team, and presented his assessment. He clearly articulated his evaluation with recommendations and outlined a series of action plans. His program team acknowledged that the assessment was accurate

and that it illustrated his ability to listen to their concerns and ideas. One member of the program said, "We presented similar concerns to William on a number of occasions. I for one am glad you listened to the concerns, validated them, and are helping us with a plan of action."

Carl let the team know that William had accepted a new position. He also said, "With your support, I will carry this assessment and plan to senior management for approval. I will only do so, however, if you are committed to it and will continue to voice your concerns when you see them, and work together to resolve them." His core team agreed. Team buy-in was important because the next steps Carl outlined did not focus on terminating the program. Rather, his next steps focused on turning the program around and delivering the planned business benefits. Carl left the core team meeting to present his findings and turnaround plan to the executive team.

Carl presented his assessment and proposal to the Healthteq management team. They agreed with the assessment and asked him to arrange a meeting with the client as soon as possible. Carl held that meeting and presented his plans to the client and won their support to proceed.

"Right-Tracking" the Program

Carl focused his immediate next steps on conducting coaching sessions with his project managers and team leads. He discussed both problems and successes that he saw with the program. He actively solicited their feedback, discussed his assessment, and made recommendations required for each project. Through this process, the core team members informed Carl that they had previously met with two program team members and had provided warnings regarding their inappropriate communication with the client and users. Their communication skills were not adequate for their current assignments and previous meetings and discussions with the team members did not resolve the issues. The consensus was that the two members be moved to more appropriate assignments outside of the program. Carl helped facilitate these moves.

Although William had ensured that proper kick off meetings had taken place, the clients thought that there also should be more communication and interaction between the program manager and client management team. Carl made the following communication changes:

1. Met with the client on a weekly basis to discuss status, market, and risk. You cannot have too much client communication.

2. Developed a stakeholder plan to include identification, needs assessment, and strategies for managing their concerns with corresponding follow-up during the life of the program.

3. Continued the necessary meetings to coach project managers and team leads.

4. Continued to monitor the program process to ensure it remained aligned with the business and product marketing strategy and planned return on investment—Job 1 is business strategy alignment.

5. Ensured that resource planning and management requirements were met for the program and projects. The program manager has to create a sense of urgency (and rationale) for proper program resourcing.

6. Ensured that knowledge sharing took place and lessons learned were documented and used. Continuous organizational success is created from learning and knowledge sharing within and across programs.

During the reorganization efforts, Carl conducted ongoing communication sessions with his management team and users. To gain their respect and support, Carl ensured that his communication was open, honest, and that he operated with the utmost integrity. He consistently operated in that manner and established weekly communication meetings with management. He met with projects managers, business and technical leads, and other team members to restate the program's vision, goals, objectives, and expectations for each project.

Instead of being completed the following October as planned, the program was successfully closed at the end of June—four months early. This created a large cost saving, but more importantly, the customer was satisfied with the final result and Healthteq realized business value that senior management once thought was a loss.

Keys to Turn-Around Success

Effective communication was the keystone to Carl's turn-around success. However, it was not the only factor. His application of solid program management practices was also important as described below.

Important to any program turn-around effort is putting due diligence into resetting the program on the right trajectory. Carl began with reexamining the business and solutions requirements and gaining mutual agreement with the client on the appropriate requirements going forward.

Additionally, he worked with his core team to establish configuration management, quality assurance, and change management processes for the program. A two-tiered change management process was instituted at both the program level and project team level.

With a new set of requirements in place, Carl created a program work breakdown structure and worked with his team to identify project deliverables, due dates, primary program milestones, and critical deadlines. This information was used to create a new program map, project-level schedules, and revised integrated program plan.

Carl also had to make some resource adjustments. In particular, he had to replace the two team members who were disruptive to both the users and the program team. He worked with the appropriate project managers and functional managers to remove them from the program and replace them with people who possessed the necessary technical and interpersonal skills.

Finally, Carl established a program governance committee to oversee the program and provide direction and guidance through the remainder of the program cycle. For the first nine weeks following Carl's appointment as program manager, he provided weekly program status and performance reports to increase the confidence of the governance committee and senior management team that program turn-around was possible.

Carl successfully turned this program around and delivered on customer expectations and business goals. His primary competencies in doing so were centered on effective communication, collaboration, and negotiation skills. He also demonstrated business savvy and solid program management expertise to diagnose the current situation and to create a plan to "right-track" the program. Importantly, however, Carl had people skills to quickly establish rapport and build trust and credibility with a diverse group of stakeholders. In the end, Carl maintained his successful track record of planning, leading, and delivering program results.

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