

CHIEF PROJECTS OFFICER

To Have or Not to Have?

By A. Matt Piazza & Satinder Baweja

Introduction

In today's corporate structure, a serious communication gap exists at the C-level between the customary business disciplines, like operations, marketing, & IT, and the project management discipline. This communication gap forces the project management's requirements to travel (like a passenger) through tactical communication channels of the other disciplines to carry the project management requirements up to the strategic C-level (see Figure 1).

"Have-Not" Culture

While Marketing, Operations and Information Technology have strategic focus, project management is missing equal strategic visibility. The current communication path and method as shown in Figure 1 both dilutes the understanding and reduces the impact that the project management discipline has to the bottom line. This dilution is caused by typical political behavior when a message is carried to the top by others that have their own discipline priorities. Considering today's extreme competitive nature, this gap reduces the corporation's ability to deliver key strategic initiatives.

Strategic		CEO	↔	COO	↔	CIO		Goals
		⌘		⌘		⌘		
Tactical		Marketing Manager	↔	Ops Manager	↔	IT Manager		Objectives
Disciplines		Business		Operation		Information		
		⌘		⌘		⌘		
		Project Managers						
		Projects						

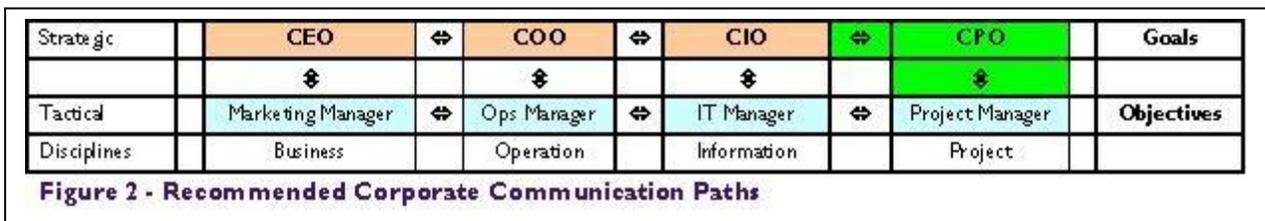
Figure 1 – Current Corporate Communication Paths

Even though the average corporate structure is void of a Chief Project Officer, corporations have invested in the project management discipline in the tactical level to improve the bottom line. The Standish Group, a well-respected research firm, conducted several surveys on IT project performances. The results of a survey in the mid 90's showed that only 16% of IT projects were successful. After more corporations invested in project management practices, an early 2002 Standish

survey showed that the IT projects success rate increased to 26%. Conclusion, the general use of project management practices helped, but the expected bottom line improvement had not been fully realized.

“Have” Culture

Today’s executives have the option of establishing a Chief Project Officer (CPO). This position can provide a new communication channel to assist the CEO with integrating the business needs with corporate strategic and operational initiatives (see Figure 2). The CPO can ensure the alignment of project management with the strategic decisions made by other executives that impact the bottom line (horizontal communication). This alignment will improve the bottom line performance.



The CPO can work with project managers to convert strategic goals into tactical objectives with projects (vertical communication). Project managers at the tactical level can better understand corporate strategies communicated by the CPO. With better understanding, project managers will deliver better results.

Managers throughout the corporation will appreciate the CPO position as they will no longer be burdened with carrying the project managers’ requirements to the C-level.

Summary

To improve competitiveness and profitability, the corporations should establish the Chief Project Officer. The CPO can ensure the realization of project management’s contributions to the bottom line.

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