

## Project Management for Team Members: Series Introduction

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### The Need for Project Management for Team Members

This is the first article in a series on “Project Management for Team Members”. While it is clear and obvious that team members contribute to project success, almost nothing has been written about the skills and behaviors that project team members should have in order to effectively and satisfactorily participate in a project environment.

At the end of 2015, some keyword searches were made on amazon.com to see how many project management books were available targeted at the main project participants: project managers, project sponsors, line managers and other executives, and team members. The results are summarized in Figure 1 where we have used a standard pyramid to qualitatively display the increasing number of people involved in projects based on their role. Of course project sponsors, functional managers and other executives are much less in number compared to project managers (normally they support many projects in parallel) while project team members are much more in number compared to project managers. Numbers on the right side of the pyramid indicate how many publications targeted at each project management role are available (on amazon.com).



*Figure 1. Number of project management books by target audience.*

It would be wrong to expect the number of publications to be proportional to the amount of people in each role since the focus of their work is different. For project sponsors, functional managers and other executives, supporting projects may occupy just a small percentage of

their working time and responsibility, so it is not strange that only a small number of publications are targeted at them. For project managers the situation may vary. In some cases being project manager may be a person's main role in an organization and consequently it may absorb a good deal of their total working time; in other cases being a project manager is more an exception than a rule, but even in this case the achieved project performance might have an impact on their career. For team members the situation is very similar to that of project managers, with the difference being that it is sometimes easier for team members to blame project managers for poor project performance than for project managers to blame project sponsors and other executives.

To summarize, it makes sense for publications targeted at project managers to be more in number compared to publications targeted at other project roles, but having just one publication<sup>1</sup> targeted at team members is, quite frankly, disappointing.

Some may say there is no difference between project management for project managers and project management for team members and, for this reason, there is no need for publications explicitly targeted at project team members.

As someone who is involved in management education, and after having discussed this issue with many other project management professors and trainers, I would disagree with this view. Very often organizations arrange project management training for their employees but then, when the participants introduce themselves at the start of the course, it soon becomes clear that many of them do not (and will not in the foreseeable future) act as project managers.

Even during their presentations it is clear that their learning goals are quite different from those of a project manager and very often, while they might appreciate the course structure and the professionalism of trainers etc., they point out that some contents do not perfectly fit with their role and thus their ability to implement what they will learn may be minimal. It is no coincidence that some training providers offer project management courses targeted at team members. However, from a brief survey we conducted in 2014, the number of trainer providers that explicitly offer this kind of program is still limited.

Project management for team members is not entirely different from "traditional" project management, but it should be recognized that participating in a project versus leading a project requires some customizations. For example, organizing a kick-off meeting is different from simply participating in it, coordinating the development of the WBS is different from contributing to its generation, defining project goals is different from translating those goals at team member level, and assessing change requests at project level is different from assessing them at task level.

For these reasons, we argue that re-interpreting project management by taking into consideration the needs and perspectives of project team members is not a trivial exercise.

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<sup>1</sup> Sampietro, M. Villa, T. (foreword by Russell D. Archibald). *Empowering Project Teams: Using Project Followership to Improve Performance*. CRC Press, 2014.

## **Team Members' Contribution to Project Success: Project Followership**

A starting point in understanding the peculiar characteristics of project management for team members is recognizing how project team members can contribute to project success: on the one hand they are asked for technical and specialist contributions related to their area of expertise, and on the other hand they are asked for managerial contributions in the key stages of the project.

The technical and specialist contribution considers the team member as a point of reference for a particular subject area (knowledge of a product, experience in a specific technology, familiarity with a particular customer environment, mastery of a complex regulatory framework). The managerial contribution instead refers to a set of project management actions for which the expert's contribution is crucial. For instance, think of schedule/cost estimates on certain project activities, the identification of the main project risks, the analysis of variances during the work progress review, the handling of change requests to the initial plan, and capitalizing on the experiences gained from the project.

According to this perspective, the project team member interacts with the project manager and the other members of the team even on managerial aspects, sharing assessments, proposals and actions that help to strengthen the project management system.

We propose to define the managerial contribution of the project team members “project followership”. Project followership means “proactive participation in all managerial aspects of the project work within an individual's visibility horizon” (Sampietro and Villa, 2014)<sup>2</sup>.

The term “followership” does not have negative connotations (Boccialetti 1995, Chaleff 1995, Kelley 1992) and should not be seen as disparaging for the following reasons:

- a follower's role in supporting the achievement of objectives should not be read as “facilitating the careers of others”, instead it means supporting the group in achieving higher levels of performance, which have a positive impact on all;
- being a good follower does not mean being inferior to the leader; a leader without good collaborators could not be a good leader and, vice versa, collaborators without a good leader to coordinate them would have less chance of success, less space to express themselves, fewer career opportunities and fewer opportunities to engage in motivating activities;
- in our working lives we all play both leader and follower roles; so we should not associate these labels with power but rather conduct that is appropriate in some situations and less so in others.

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<sup>2</sup> For additional hints on the concept of Project Followership, please refer to: Sampietro, M. Project Followership: How Team Members Can Contribute to Project Success. PM World Journal, Vol. III, Issue 10, October 2014.

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## **Project Management for Team Members Articles Series: What's Next**

During 2016 the series of articles on project management for team members will address some relevant topics of project followership. Specifically:

- Proper behaviors of project team members
- The role of project team members in stakeholder management
- Project team members and the definition and interpretation of project goals and objectives
- The crucial role of project team members in providing estimates and the issues they might face during the estimate process
- Project team members and change requests
- Participating in project meetings (kick-off meeting and status meetings)

The tone of the articles will be practical and pragmatic in order to facilitate understanding and the proper implementation of the topics presented.

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## About the Author



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**Marco Sampietro** obtained a Ph.D. at the University of Bremen, Germany. Since 2000 he has been a professor at [SDA Bocconi School of Management](#), Milan, Italy. SDA Bocconi School of Management is ranked among the top Business Schools in the world (Financial Times, Forbes, Bloomberg, and The Economist rankings). He is a Core Faculty Member at SDA Bocconi School of Management and teaches Project Management in the MBA – Master of Business Administration, and GEMBA – Global Executive Master of Business Administration programs. He is Faculty Member at [MISB](#) – Mumbai International School of Business, the Indian subsidiary of Bocconi University, and Visiting Professor at IHU – International Hellenic University, Greece. He is also a Contract Professor at [Bocconi University](#) and [Milano Fashion Institute](#) for the Project Management courses.

He was a speaker at the NASA Project Management Challenge 2007, 2008, and 2011, in the USA, and a speaker at the PMI Global European Congress, Italy, 2010. He is Member of the Steering Committee of IPMA-Italy.

He is co-author and/or editor of 10 books on project management and 7 books on IT management. Among them: [Empowering Project Teams. Using Project Followership to Improve Performance. CRC Press, 2014.](#) Finally, he is the author of award-winning case studies and papers.

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