

Project Administration: Traditional Responsibilities and Future Directions ¹

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This article looks at the traditional responsibilities assigned to project administration and how emerging technologies may change or even eliminate many of the activities currently performed. The first section segregates responsibilities between a home office function and a site-based one. This construct is arbitrary and on large complex projects many if not all of the home office functions move to the project office which in some instances may be based at the site.

Traditional project administration responsibilities

The traditional responsibilities of project administration are enumerated below. Different organizations and project teams may organize certain responsibilities differently including which ones are to be site-based. In the following section we will discuss how these activities may change in light of emerging technologies.

Today, project administration responsibilities typically include:

- **Project administration (office)**
 - Procedures – administrative; document management; authorized signature list; delegations of authority; travel approvals; expense reports
 - Communications
 - Processes, systems, coding/numbering, forms, templates, required documentation, required distribution, logs
 - Communication workflow management – Contract required communication; external communications (to and from) – clients, subcontractors, supplies, regulatory and administrative agencies, stakeholders; meeting minutes and notes; telephone conversation records and confirmations; project team communications (internal); e-mail (internal and external); faxes; trip reports; job bulletins (disseminate project specific information – additions/changes to the project execution plan or project procedures manual; administrative matters); required notices; trip reports; audio and video project records (recorded audio and video calls); protected (attorney

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- privileged) communication; documents subject to IP or security protocols
 - Administration of project collaboration system (coordination with information manager)
 - Consistency of corporate and/or project branding
 - Project orientation and training calendar and records
 - Coordination with accounting
 - Coordination with legal related to critical decisions related to the prime contract and baseline; changes related to scope, schedule, compensation or terms and conditions (change control log)
 - Insurance and bond certificates and tracking
 - Personnel listing and project network directories with approved privileges; contact information; personnel authorization requests
 - Project files – project and discipline filing systems with required levels of security; maintenance per records retention policy. Files include correspondence; engineering deliverables; project estimates, schedules; purchase orders and contracts; construction related documents; and safety related documents
 - Drawing and document matrix and distribution and form of distribution (electronic or hard copy); tracking of contract deliverables
 - Progress reports (assemble inputs; prepare dashboards and required client reports for review)
 - Action item lists and status
 - Project administrative management – meeting coordination and scheduling
 - Overall administrative setup – home office, workshare, joint venture, module yard(s), site(s)
 - Records closeout and retention at project completion
 - Closeout of administrative tasks, services, facilities and equipment
 - Develop project history and issue at closeout
- **Administrative manager (site)**
 - Office services
 - Accounting
 - Payroll
 - Warehousing
 - Local purchasing
 - Personnel

Future directions in project administration

The increased use of AI and other technologies will likely significantly change project administration in the future. Some key aspects that are likely to change include:

- Communication workflow management – meeting minutes and notes as well as audio and video recordings of meetings and calls will take advantage of transcripts prepared using voice recognition.
- Change control – change requests will be more rigorously managed through project workflow processes which will be completely automated. Change documentation will be checked against contract, project execution plan and project management procedures for accuracy and compliance. Required precedent sign-offs will be confirmed against established approval authorities. Value adding actions enabled in the future will include incremental risk assessment as a result of the change. This will include comparison against other similar changes as well as assessing the risk of project disruption. Blockchain technology will be utilized through client or vendor approval including input to billing or accounts payable once authorized.
- Document tracking – AI-enabled document analytics can identify new documents received; ascertain whether they are a contract or vendor deliverable; classify and code the document for future tracking and use; prepare a summary or abstract of the document; and assign it to a particular work process either underway or initiate a new one. For project-initiated documents, checking against standards for such documents (required content and form), compliance items and contract requirements can be performed. Document quality can be tested against training data and suggestions for improvement offered prior to transmittal.
- Progress reports – timeliness and quality of progress reports will be enhanced through automated extraction of desired data and incorporation in processed form in client required reports and project dashboards. AI-enabled project health assessments can be contrasted with project team forecasts. Narratives and analysis by key managers will be further informed by automated compilation of relevant project documents, including correspondence, that speak to sources of variance. Additional narrative support will come from auto-generated textual insights from data.² Abstracting tools will prepare focused executive summaries.

² PowerBI or Tableau adapt their insights in real time through applied filters

Increasingly progress reports will shift from formal periodic submissions to real time interactive project intelligence and insight.

- Action item list – virtual assistants will participate in meetings, capturing actions and providing a summary at the close of the meeting
- Project administration – virtual assistants schedule meetings; reserve appropriately sized and equipped meeting rooms; send calendar invites including required remote links. Automated work processes and voice recognition prepare transcripts and extract action items. Meeting effectiveness can be assessed by the quality of action items generated or decisions made for the time invested in meetings. Action items linked to key performance indicators (KPI) can be flagged and the quality of the meeting based on its contribution to the achievement of the KPI assessed retrospectively. Action item responses can be assessed for both completeness and quality flagging where intervention may be required.
- Project History – can be automatically generated by assessing importance of key meetings, decisions, milestones and deliverables. Links to related documents or other knowledge objects can be automatically generated. At a future point this project history will be linked to a digital twin of the facility providing a richer information base for the operating and maintenance period. Evolution of variance from the original baseline can be tracked aiding in project lessons learned assessments.
- Warehousing – requirements will be reduced and automated through automated material tracking (RFID) linked to smart supply chain control towers, automating major elements of not only the supply chain but also warehouse and materials management.

Summary

Technology, especially AI, will impact all elements of project delivery. Opportunities to accelerate the benefits of these technologies exist both at the workplace as well as in the supporting activities that enable project execution. In this paper we have highlighted some future directions in project administration.

References

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Bob Prieto is a senior executive effective in shaping and executing business strategy and a recognized leader within the infrastructure, engineering and construction industries. Currently Bob heads his own management consulting practice, Strategic Program Management LLC. He previously served as a senior vice president of Fluor, one of the largest engineering and construction companies in the world. He focuses on the development and delivery of large, complex projects worldwide and consults with owners across all market sectors in the development of programmatic delivery strategies. He is author of nine books including “Strategic Program Management”, “The Giga Factor: Program Management in the Engineering and Construction Industry”, “Application of Life Cycle Analysis in the Capital Assets Industry”, “Capital Efficiency: Pull All the Levers” and, most recently, “Theory of Management of Large Complex Projects” published by the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA) as well as over 800 other papers and presentations.

Bob is an Independent Member of the Shareholder Committee of Mott MacDonald and a member of the board of Dar al Riyadh. He is a member of the ASCE Industry Leaders Council, National Academy of Construction, a Fellow of the Construction Management Association of America and member of several university departmental and campus advisory boards. Bob served until 2006 as a U.S. presidential appointee to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Business Advisory Council (ABAC), working with U.S. and Asia-Pacific business leaders to shape the framework for trade and economic growth. He is a member of the Millennium Challenge Corporation advisory board where he had previously served. He had previously served as both as Chairman of the Engineering and Construction Governors of the World Economic Forum and co-chair of the infrastructure task force formed after September 11th by the New York City Chamber of Commerce. Previously, he served as Chairman at Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) and a non-executive director of Cardno (ASX).

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