

## **Project Manager vs Gantt Chart Jockey: Advice for Executives and Project Sponsors <sup>1</sup>**

**Yogi Schulz**

Much has been written about reasonable project management's essential contribution to IT project success. Sadly, the reverse is also true. Absent, incompetent, or insufficient project management invariably contributes to project failure.

As an executive who needs the IT project to succeed and is likely the project sponsor, how can you recognize if a superior, competent project manager is leading your active project or an insufficiently disciplined person who exhibits Gantt chart jockey behaviors is leading? The difference will determine project success or fiasco.

You can be reassured or panicked by observing your project manager in action as they lead work on the 10 Project Management Knowledge Areas common to all projects. The Project Management Institute ([PMI](http://www.pmi.org)) defines these knowledge areas in its Project Management Body of Knowledge ([PMBOK](http://www.pmi.org)). This article discusses knowledge areas 1 through 5. Here's how to differentiate good from bad project management and determine if intervention is required.

### **Project Integration Management**

A project led by a Gantt chart jockey exhibits these features:

- A brief, high-level project statement that alludes to general feel-good themes without elaboration.
- A summary project plan that illustrates the approximate elapsed times for planned project phases.
- The project plan is rarely updated after initial development.
- Little or no risk management.
- The actual project status is a guess.

By contrast, an experienced project manager leads the development of:

- A project charter that describes the project in some detail and includes a clear goal statement.
- A project plan that focuses on the effort required to produce deliverables and is updated regularly.
- A comprehensive risk management process.
- Regular project status reports.

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## **Project Scope Management**

A Gantt chart jockey views scope-enlarging opportunities as a way to increase project importance by claiming to deliver more value and by asking for more budget. As scope is added, increasing project size is more likely to lead to project failure than success because the project will collapse under its own size and complexity.

An experienced project manager is acutely aware that even the most brilliantly written project charter is full of scope ambiguity. As it progresses, a well-run project will increase its understanding of scope as a product of system requirements elucidation and detailed design. This work will reveal many additional scope opportunities. Appropriate project scope management is indicated by a well-defined scope management process that seeks to contain scope and defer opportunities to a subsequent project.

## **Project Time Management**

Gantt chart jockeys see time tracking by project task as much too tedious and time-consuming. On these projects, work on deliverables is assumed to have started on the planned start date. Often, deliverables are shown as complete when the person assigned to the deliverable says so. As a result, the project gradually falls further and further behind the published schedule due to the required rework of deliverables, which are later discovered to be incomplete.

A competent project manager leads the work to:

- Create a reasonably accurate project schedule by seeking reasonable effort estimates for the tasks required to produce the deliverables.
- Ensure a defensible project schedule by defining precedence relationships among the deliverables.
- Support reliable progress reporting based on time, meaning effort, tracking of the tasks in the project plan.

## **Project Cost Management**

Gantt chart jockeys tend to create a project budget with few line items and estimated costs based mainly on the planned number of elapsed months shown in the original project schedule. The project cost is updated monthly with the actual cost. Revisions to the estimated cost to complete are based solely on the remaining budget. This horrible practice produces a calculated variance amount that is excitingly low initially and ultimately wildly misleading.

Reasonable project management of costs is indicated by:

- A project budget consisting of many line items or pages of line items based on effort estimates.
- Project cost is updated monthly with actual cost.
- Revisions to the estimated cost to complete are based on the percent complete for every active task.

- Calculating a projected cost variance amount at completion every month that is realistic.

## **Project Quality Management**

Gantt chart jockey projects leave the definition of quality up to the team member responsible for each deliverable. After all, the assigned person is the most qualified to produce the deliverable. Because subsequent deliverables are typically dependent on the quality of predecessor deliverables, quality deteriorates throughout the project until the project becomes bogged down in massive rework.

Reasonable project management is indicated by quality management that consists of the following:

- A defined quality management process. The process for IT projects includes a detailed approach to software testing.
- Review of deliverables by peers and business staff.
- Revisions to the deliverables based on review comments.
- A project culture that positions the review process as helpful guidance and not as character assassination of the person responsible for the deliverable.

## **Alternative Actions**

Based on your observations of how your project is handling these five PMBOK knowledge areas, you, as project sponsor, will take one of the following actions:

- Compliment the project manager because you are assured that your project is in good hands.
- Indicate to the project manager that some project management improvements are required.
- Replace that Gantt chart jockey project manager because the project will fail.

Part two of this series will be published next month.

## About the Author



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**Yogi Schulz** has over 40 years of Information Technology experience in various industries. Yogi works extensively in the petroleum industry to select and implement financial, production revenue accounting, land & contracts and geotechnical systems. He manages projects that arise from changes in business requirements, from the need to leverage technology opportunities and from mergers. His specialties include IT strategy, web strategy and systems project management.

Mr. Schulz regularly speaks to industry groups and writes a regular column for [IT World Canada and for Engineering.com](#). He has written for Microsoft.com and the Calgary Herald. His writing focuses on project management and IT developments of interest to management. Mr. Schulz served as a member of the Board of Directors of the PPDM Association for twenty years until 2015. Learn more at <https://www.corvelle.com/>. He can be contacted at [yogischulz@corvelle.com](mailto:yogischulz@corvelle.com)

His new book, co-authored by Jocelyn Schulz Lapointe, is "[A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide: Improving Project Performance.](#)"