

From Strategy to Program Management

GP Sudhakar

This article discusses program management in detail. It defines portfolio, program and project. How programs are derived from corporate strategy is also explained. Quality of programs, collaboration between projects, tracking programs, selection of projects, status check of projects, Project Status Review (PSR) meetings, General Information Meetings (GIM), Senior Management Review (SMR) meetings have also been discussed here. The needed skills for a program manager are also discussed. Risk management of programs and challenges faced by the program managers are also explained in this article. Over all it is an introduction to program management.

Project management is the maturing area in the Indian IT industry. Hundreds of PMPs are working in India in the IT industry. The yet to be matured area is the program management and portfolio management in the Indian IT industry. Already hundreds of program managers and portfolio managers are working in India in different industries. Instead of calling one as a program manager, in some companies they call them as Senior Project Manager or Delivery Manager responsible for multiple projects. In this article, we will see what are the challenges the program managers face and what is meant by program management, how project management, program management and portfolio management are related?

Definition

Project management is meeting customer requirements with skills, knowledge and experience within the budget in the provided time with good quality. Program management is managing related projects at the same time. This will be done by the program managers in the organization. The program may in turn contain some sub-programs as well. The Portfolio management is managing of unrelated programs and projects. The VP/CTO/CIOs and Director (IT) do the portfolio management, if they don't have a separate Portfolio Manager in their organization.

Program Identification

First of all we should know how the organization strategy is converted into the individual tasks and it is shown below:

Strategy -> Portfolio -> Program -> Project -> Module -> Task/Activity

From Strategy, Portfolios are identified. From Portfolios, Programs are identified. The portfolio manager divides his portfolio into programs and assigns them to the program manager. The program manager divides his program into projects and sub-programs. These projects will be managed by the project managers.

About the Author

GP Sudhakar, PMP, works as Product Manager at Canarys Automations Ltd., Bangalore. He is Project Management Institute, USA certified Project Management Professional (PMP). The author can be reached at purna24@hotmail.com

Project Selection

From the given programs, projects are identified by the program manager. The program manager then chooses the project managers based on the projects. He selects the projects using project selection methods. Sometimes the program manager may act as a project sponsor in some organizations.

Individual Project Status Check

The project manager is responsible for the delivery of the individual project. He plans, executes, monitors and controls the individual project. He is responsible for the success of the project or failure of the project. The Project Status Review (PSR) meetings are useful for checking the project progress. The project manager is responsible for project tracking as well. Individual project managers report their progress to the concerned program manager. The project manager can use Earned Value Management (EVM) techniques to check the deviations in time and cost. He can use network diagrams for scheduling purposes.

Monitoring Program Progress

The program progress is checked by the program manager based on the individual project progress. The General Information Meetings (GIM) are useful for communicating the program progress to the stakeholders. This is done by many well-known product development companies in the mobile phone industry. The Senior Management Review (SMR) Meetings are useful to gather inputs from each project and consolidate them and make a note the progress of the program.

For example, one project may depend on deliverables of another project. The output of a project may be the input to another project. These dependencies need to be checked and tracked by the program manager.

Aligning between Projects

Definitely the program manager has to have information about all the projects in his program. In some organizations, requirements management and feature selection for the product are also part of program management. An example for program may be the development of a mobile phone. The hardware development becomes one project and the software development for the mobile phone becomes another project. However these two projects are related. Hence, it is a program.

Risk Management

There can be risks common to all the projects in the program. These kind of risks can be identified by the program manager and he can assign a risk owner for individual risks. It is easy to track if we identify the risks at the program level itself. Risk identification is a continuous process. The program manager is responsible for any cost and schedule over runs of the program. That's why he has to track the respective projects closely and ensure the timely completion of the projects of the program. The quality of the program depends

on quality of all the deliverable of the respective projects. Hence, Project managers should ensure the quality deliverables within cost and within the time limits. For majority of the program managers, schedule over run is the major area of concern.

Needed Skills for Program Management

Definitely the program manager needs to have communications, decision-making and negotiation skills in addition to technical skills like features management for the product. In some IT MNCs, Program management keeps product development, maintenance and testing teams as well in their control in addition to the project management teams. In software services organizations, related customer projects are kept under one program. There are program managers in IT services firms such as Wipro and there are program managers in product development companies such as IBM.

Recently the Project Management Institute (PMI), USA has come up with a certification called Program Management Professional (PgMP) for program managers who are working in different industries.

Challenges Faced by the Program Managers

As we know, program managers will be managing multiple related projects at the same time with the help of respective project managers. There are few areas in which program managers are concerned about. They are coordination among project managers, inter dependencies among the projects, timelines of the projects, cost distribution among the projects, human resource acquisition and allotment to respective projects. Sometimes in product scenario, program managers are concerned about the features of the product which go into the respective releases.

The program managers should communicate with everybody in the program through general information meetings periodically. This will reduce the communication gaps in the program and will be useful for the successful execution of the programs. 

Reference # 17M-2007-08-08-01

Project Management Issues
<p>Some of the frequent program management issues are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict in resource allocation. Different projects share the same resources. • Different projects have different and changing business priority and therefore different levels of commitment. This is especially felt in the case of resource allocation: Over-allocation in the committed project, under-allocation in the lower priority projects. • Scope changes of the individual projects because of internal organization issues or external market driven issues. • Conflicting demands from the different sponsors of the projects in the program. • The various project sponsors have their own view on requirements and goals of the overall program (and strategy).
<p>Source: www.ezinearticles.com</p>