Project roles and teams

MODULE 4 | PART B.1 | STUDENT COMPANION

Who does what?

Project sponsor

Represents the funder
Sets objectives, priority and team
Manages senior stakeholders
Steps in on serious problems
Supports without micromanaging

Project manager

Monitors scope, budget and cost
Organises people and resources
Owns targets and deliverables
Challenges: uncertainty, shifting targets, too little authority

Management accountant

Information for decisions and control
Budgets, variances, capital budgeting
Challenges: no history, ethics, realistic assumptions, awkward data

Leading means inspiring people to deliver - everyone on the team leads in some way

Skills a project manager needs

Technical skills	Interpersonal skills
Process: project techniques such as critical path analysis, risk analysis, capital budgeting	Communication: clear information to everyone involved; listening
Project-specific: e.g. IT skills on an IT project	Problem-solving: spot problems early; handle surprises
General knowledge: enough to discuss the technical work and data	Insight: pick out what matters from incomplete or misleading data
	Negotiation, conflict resolution and leadership

The management accountant's four challenges

Challenge	Why it matters
Accurate, timely information	High uncertainty and no history - many assumptions and estimates
Ethics and political sensitivity	Managers act on the information
Realistic assumptions	Management's eagerness must not bend the capital budgeting assumptions
Politically awkward data	A manager may want reports to look better (or worse) than the data

Four ways to lead a project: acquire the resources (inadequate resources are a common cause of failure); motivate and build a team quickly; hold a clear vision while solving crises; communicate formally and informally. All four apply to the management accountant.

Organising the project team

Task-force team

- Dedicated to the project; manager has full authority
- Focus, autonomy, own resources, cross-functional experience
- Idle time on small projects; absences hard to cover
- Specialists lose touch; no job to return to; hard to fix problems later

Matrix team

- Stay in functional departments while working on the project
- Stable career path; wide range of specialists
- Staff return to department work in quiet periods
- Role uncertainty; two bosses; manager may lack authority

Skunk Works, 1943: a dedicated team delivered the XP-80 prototype in 143 days (180 had been promised)

International project teams

Feature	What it means
More collaboration	People and tasks are dispersed
Parallelism	Tasks run at the same time in several locations
Changing requirements	Higher staff turnover and shifting direction
Semi-autonomous work	Much of the work is beyond direct supervision
People to look for	Relevant and international experience; teamwork; problem-solving; juggling demands; communication; energy; tool knowledge; cultural understanding; travel; languages

Making virtual teams work

Goodwill trust
People keep their promises

Competence trust
People are able to deliver it

Habits that help
Meet face to face when possible - constant contact - agreed information protocols - keep everyone informed - agreed way to resolve conflict

Mars Climate Orbiter, 1999: one team used imperial units, the other expected metric - and the spacecraft was lost

Sources: histories of the P-80 Shooting Star (design began 26 June 1943); NASA Mars Climate Orbiter Mishap Investigation Board report

(1999).

Practice questions

MODULE 4 | PART B.1 | TRY THESE BEFORE THE WORKED ANSWERS

Question 1 - Whose job is it?

Situation	Sponsor, project manager or management accountant?
(a) Negotiates the contract with an outside customer and keeps the relationship healthy	
(b) Decides which tasks happen this week and who does them	
(c) Builds the cash flow model for the business case	
(d) Steps in when the project falls three months behind	
(e) Flags that the revenue assumptions look too optimistic	

Question 2 - Task force or matrix?

Recommend a team structure, with reasons, for (a) a two-year build of a new hospital wing, and (b) a three-month update of an insurer's customer complaints process.

Question 3 - A virtual team charter

A software team works across Perth, Manila and London. Suggest four rules for its communication protocol and explain how each builds goodwill or competence trust.

Worked answers

MODULE 4 | PART B.1 | WORKED ANSWERS - ATTEMPT THE QUESTIONS FIRST

Question 1 - Whose job is it?

Situation	Answer
(a)	Sponsor - high-level stakeholder relationships and the contract
(b)	Project manager
(c)	Management accountant
(d)	Sponsor (with the project manager) - serious problems
(e)	Management accountant - realistic assumptions, ethical behaviour

Question 2 - Task force or matrix?

(a) Task force: a long, large project justifies dedicated people who stay busy, with full authority for the project manager; plan for the team's return to roles at the end. **(b) Matrix:** a short process update can draw on specialists from claims, customer service and IT part-time, keeping them in their departments; clarify priorities with their managers.

Question 3 - A virtual team charter

Examples: a shared daily update window across time zones (goodwill - no one disappears); every task has an owner and a due date that is met or renegotiated early (goodwill); work samples and peer review in the first fortnight (competence); one agreed tool and format for decisions and specifications, including units and conventions (both); a set process for raising and resolving conflict (goodwill).