

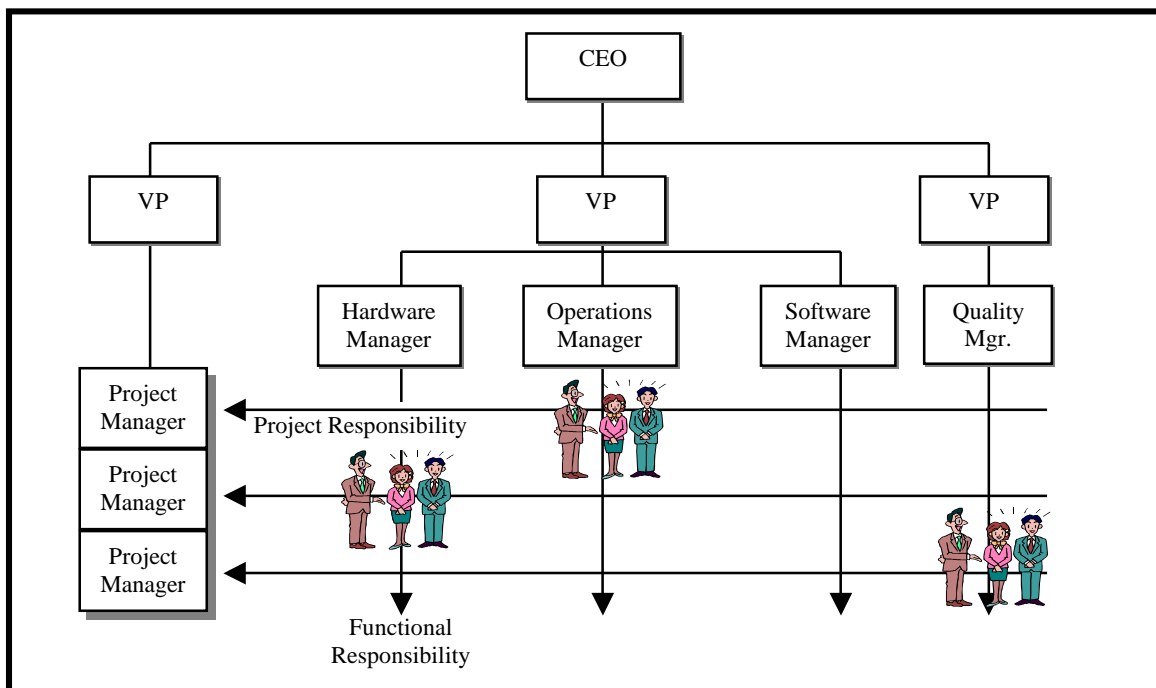
Project Manager, Program Manager, Product Manager

By Michael D. Taylor

Titles such as *project manager*, *program manager*, and *product manager* are often used interchangeably even though there is a definite role distinction between them.

What Is Project Management?

PMI defines project management as “*The application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements.*”¹ Until the Project Management Institute initiated “A Guideline to the Project Management Body of Knowledge” PMBOK® in 1996, it was anyone’s guess as to what this meant. Books written prior to this time had widely varying content with little consistency between authors. Even today corporate job postings for the position of project manager are inconsistent. Fortunately, that is changing and we are now seeing a convergence on the role of the project manager. Project management certificate programs, such as UCSC Extension’s, are making this happen.



Project Managers

Project managers working in a matrix organization usually have overall project authority and responsibility, including schedule, cost, and scope. They are generalists, rather than technical overseers. Their job is to achieve a project goal while working within the constraints of time, money, product or service features, quality, and risks. In a matrix organization the project manager has no one reporting to him/her administratively.

¹ “A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge,” 2000 Edition.

Instead, needed skills are “borrowed” from the functional managers. The project managers own the work while the functional managers own the resources.

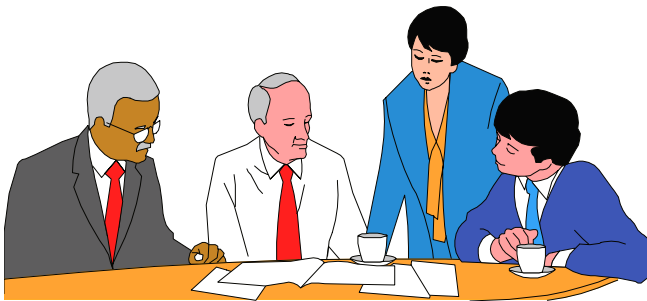
Program Managers

Program managers perform a role which is similar to project managers except it may extend over a longer period of time and may consist of several individual projects, usually similar in nature. Program managers often play a key role in conceiving and planning long-term project objectives, along with functional managers, production managers and financial managers. When a company commits to a new project, the program manager may be the individual who charters the project and selects the project manager.

Product Managers

Product managers are usually those individuals who are given authority to oversee all aspects of a product’s lifecycle, including marketing, initial development, testing, production, upgrades, and sales. In this role they are sometimes referred to as *product-line managers*. Product managers may have project managers reporting to them during the initial product design, development and test phases.

Other Roles Confused with Project Manager



There are times when a technical individual is promoted to the position of “project manager” but their role is simply to oversee the technical portions of a project and to keep it on track using commercial schedule software. Their role is primarily one of a technical *project coordinator*, or *project expediter*.

They are really not project managers since they do not have overall project authority and responsibility.

Functional managers can also be called project managers but they are not because they perform an entirely different role. Theirs is to bring in highly skilled personnel to the corporation and assign them to the projects in a matrix organization. They also ensure that these skilled specialists are kept current in their field through training and development. Functional managers generally provide the technical input to the projects, supplying skilled individuals, as needed, to support suggested technologies and processes. A comparison of the typical roles and responsibilities of project managers, functional managers, and product managers can be seen in the following table.

Role and Responsibility Allocations	Project Manager	Functional Manager	Product Manager
Responsible for developing this table.	S	S	P
Typically, obtains initial project estimates (cost, schedule) during project selection phase.	S	S	P
Establishes overall project priorities between cost, schedule, scope, and quality.	S	S	P
Establishes the project charter.	S	S	P
Acts as the project sponsor.	S	S	P
Provides skilled functional personnel to various projects.	S	P	
Balances the project priorities when trade-off decisions must be made.	P	S	
Is the customer's point-of-contact for the project and ensures customer loyalty.	S	S	P
Administrative boss for skilled, functional employees.	S	P	
Directs skilled, functional employees while working on the project.	P	S	
Determines long-range support needs for projects within a corporation.	S	P	
Determines the technical approach and the technology to use on a project.	S	P	
Monitors and controls project progress.	P	S	
Conducts annual performance reviews for skilled, functional employees.	S	P	

Manages the indirect budget for company functional employees.	S	P	
Identifies any project skill deficiencies.	P	S	
Resolves any project skill deficiencies.	S	P	
Keeps skilled personnel trained and up-to-date in their field of technology.	S	P	
Provides opportunities for cross-training outside of normal skills.	P	S	
Establishes a career path planning for skilled employees.	S	P	
Provides project status to upper management.	P	S	
Organizes multi-functional teams to support project needs.	P	S	

Note: "P" means has primary responsibility; "S" means has supportive responsibility

Where To Get More Information

"Project Management for Business and Technology," by John M. Nicholas, Prentice Hall, 2001. ISBN 0-13-018328-8.

"Project Management, A Managerial Approach," by Jack R. Meredith, and Samuel J. Mantel, Jr., John Wiley and Sons, 2000. ISBN 0-471-29829-8.