



NETWORKING FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Networking is an important tool based on communication and trust, where you access knowledge by sharing information. The purpose of this research was to investigate how valuable networking is to a project manager, what is included in that added value, and if networking is perceived to increase project success.

A qualitative study, semi constructed with in depth interviews, was used with participation of six A- and B- IPMA certified project managers.

Main findings indicate that project managers value networking highly. However, although aware of the value of networking they appear to be unaware of ways to make their networking more efficient. Findings also indicate that when project managers network efficiently it can benefit projects heavily regarding time, cost, quality and risk.

This research provides reasons why it is important to network and how the project manager may improve their networking.

Keywords: Networking, network, project management, project success, project manager, networking process

1. INTRODUCTION

For project managers to thrive in a vast world of various projects where demand for low cost, time saved, better quality and lower risk affect their work – effective networking could make the difference.

It is interesting to discover the lack of research connecting project managers to networking, as it is inherent in their work that communication is the key to success. Metaphorically, a project manager could be seen as an orchestra conductor who connects all kinds of diverse orchestra members together through networking to create and deliver quality music on time and on budget. A sort of spider controlling the network web. The objective with this research was to gain insights into how valuable networking is to project managers and how to better fulfill project success with networking by answering the following key questions:

Question 1

How valuable is networking to a project manager?

Hypothesis 1

The main value of networking is the sharing of information.

The purpose of this question is to find what element in networking is the most important to the project manager.

Question 2

Does networking increase project success?

Hypothesis 2

Effective use of networking increases project success.

The purpose of this question is to find out if effective use of networking helps meet requirements for project success when it comes to quality, time, cost and risk?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contains literature review of networking and project management and how the two concepts are interconnected to the research questions concerning value and success.

2.1 NETWORKING

Networking can be described as proactive behavior of individual's encounter when trying to develop and preserve relationships with others with the objective of mutual benefit in their work or career (Forret, M.L., & Dougherty, T.W., 2001). O'Donnell (2004) explains that existence of the network is not beneficial per se but rather the value it brings through the process of networking.

There is a lot of information about networking as a concept; why networking can be important to an individual, and the value of networking when it comes to career success (McCallum, S.Y., 2008). Networking comes in many different forms, for instance business networking (de Klerk, S., & Kroon, J., 2008), social networking (Su, C., 2011; Clipson, T.W., Wilson, S.A., & DuFrene, D.D., 2012), entrepreneurial networking (Kase, K., & Yu-Shan Liu, J., 1996; Moensted, M., 2010), as well as virtual networking (Torfason, M. T., 2012).

Networking can be examined on different levels, on a broad general level or on a more specific sublevel. It is often divided into categories; internal and external networking, formal and informal, as well as linked to personality of the individual and strength of the networking tie (McCallum, S.Y., 2008; Wolff, H., & Kim, S., 2012; O'Donnell, A., 2004). There is however a lack of research on value of networking to successful project management.

2.2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Kerzner (2013) describes project management as the act of "planning, organizing, directing and controlling of company resources for a relatively short-term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives" (p. 4).

The dynamics of an organization is constantly evolving due to increased demand for improved productivity that leads to more product complexity, rising importance of better teamwork and coordination (Carden, L., & Egan, T., 2008). In response to that increased complexity in organizations and increased demand for improved project outcome the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the International Association of Project Managers (IPMA) play a vital role in achieving results.

2.2.1 PMI

PMI ensures that project management knowledge and framework are always up to date and they provide guidelines, rules and standards for projects, program and portfolio (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2013). The project manager's framework is laid out in *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK), that is a part of PMI. The application of knowledge, tools, and technique is the core of project management to meet project requirements, which according to PMBOK is categorized into five process phases: Initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing (PMI, 2013).

Managing a project often requires identifying requirements, coping with miscellaneous expectations of the stakeholder, and handling their needs and worries. Carrying out communications back and forth between stakeholders and managing them regarding fulfilling project requirements and creating project deliverables. Also, balancing project constraints as in; scope, quality, schedule, budget, resources and risk. The constraints of a project can vary because of project specifications and different scenarios can effect it and thereby the emphasis of the project (PMI, 2013).

2.2.2 IPMA

International Project Management Association (IPMA) is a leading authority on competent project, programme and portfolio management. Its main purpose is to standardize work and processes. They also certify ability and qualifications of projects

managers by degrees from A-D, A presenting the highest (International Project Management Association [IPMA], 2006).

Project management is described by IPMA as the process of planning, organizing, monitoring and controlling all aspects of a project, and leading all involved parties to safely achieving the project objectives, within the approved project criteria of time, cost, scale and quality (IPMA, 2006).

2.3 PROJECT SUCCESS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS

The objective of a project is to create added value and avoid failure or mistakes. Furthermore, to deliver the expected results, i.e. deliver the product on time, budget and within the accepted project risk (IPMA, 2006).

According to IPMA and PMBOK, project success is based on the definition of project objectives because the main definition of success is to achieve the project objectives. The success of a project should be measured within the constraints of time, cost, scope, quality, resources, and risk as approved by the project manager and senior management. Project management success in an organization can effect greatly on how projects are carried out because of the organizational communication structure (IPMA, 2006; PMI, 2013).

2.4 THE LITERATURE OF NETWORKING

There appears to be a lack of research on connection of project management and networking. If you look at IPMA and networking the only sentence found regarding the matter is stated in a chapter about interested parties [or stakeholders]: “To help manage the interested parties, project managers may develop internal and external networks, both formal and informal, among those associated with the project” (IPMA, 2006, p.42).

Stakeholders are people or groups that are interested in or have vested interest in the project or are a part of it. It is recommended that project managers should do a

stakeholder analysis; identify who is a stakeholder, where the stakeholder interest lies and organize them regarding importance to the project (IPMA, 2006).

In PMBOK, networking is listed as a tool or a technique that plays a part of the human resource management. It is described as following: “Networking can be a useful technique at the beginning of a project. It can also be an effective way to enhance project management professional development during the project and after the project ends.” (PMI, 2013). These limited quotes show that networking is seen as valuable and project managers should give it attention.

This research emphasizes the project networking perspective that has similar relations to the business network definition of networking, which focuses on a complex relationships networking matrix that is structured through information, and is based on trust and repeated good communication (de Klerk & Kroon, 2008; de Klerk, S., & Saayman, M., 2012).

3. RESEARCH PROJECT

When it comes to networking it is necessary to determine whether or not time spent networking is practical and that it leads to getting good information. Networking can play a vital role when it comes to getting the right information when it is needed and therefore can be of great value. But networking is a two dimensional concept because it cannot go one way - when you seek information through your networking you have to be prepared to pay it back.

3.1 PROJECT DISCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this research was to find out if networking is valuable to the project manager, and if so, what is included in the added value? Further, to see if networking could provide clues on how to better ensure project success.

In order to address the research questions additional questions were created to shed a better light on the research material. The first one tries to find out if project managers have a common understanding of networking and its basics. The second two,

relate to the two main research questions; does networking increase project success and how valuable is networking to a project manager?

- a) Networking of the project manager: What is the first thing that you think of when networking is mentioned and what do you think networking is constructed from?
- b) Networking value: In what kind of situation is it relevant to network and what kind of networking is of most value? Furthermore, the researcher asks about networking in relation to information and what the values consist of.
- c) Networking and project success: Is there a connection between networking and project success as measured in cost, time, quality and risk?

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a qualitative methodology was chosen – because networking can be associated with communication and this research is a socially constructed one. Qualitative methodology is centrally concerned with the understanding of things and the quantitative methodology is concerned with measuring things and therefore ignores their participant's ability to discuss problem situations regarding the social act of networking (O'Donnell, 2004).

The data collection tool adopted in this research is the semi-structured, in-depth, interview technique. Six A- and B- IPMA certified project managers were randomly chosen to participate from an official list of certified project managers in Iceland (Project Management Association of Iceland, n.d.). Why certified project managers? Because of their expertise knowledge of project management, and the insight they could draw from experience of networking in that field.

This method is the most suitable to use when given details of individual behavior, and is key to enable the researcher to better understand information given by the interviewee. When in dialog with participants, they were given time to discuss the

questions in depth. Further questions were asked if necessary to give greater depth to the answers (O'Donnell, 2004).

Each interview was held at the participant's offices, with average duration of interviews around 50 minutes. The interviews were taken in the period of March 12th till March 25th, 2014.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

In this chapter the main research questions; how valuable is your networking as a project manager, and does networking increase project success will be addressed. Other interesting and useful results, emerging from the interviews, are presented as well, starting with how the project manager identifies networking

4.1. HOW PROJECT MANAGER IDENTIFIES NETWORKING

Interviewing project managers on networking in general exposes common understanding of the networking concept and of its value. The participants see networking as an important project management tool. This research's participants mentioned for instance;

- Networking is based on communication and through communication one gains access to valuable information.
- Networking is the power of knowing a person, where he/she is, what he/she does, his/her name and his/her assets.
- Networking is something that grows bigger as you get older, more mature and more experienced.
- How extensive and strong networking ties are depends on oneself, how efficient one is to meet people and getting to know them, and how much time one spends nurturing the network.

The results above indicate that the participants have a good general understanding of the networking concept.

4.2. NETWORKING VALUE

The first research question asks how valuable networking is to a project manager. The research participants realize that the project manager is not an expert in all sectors so there will always be a knowledge gap. Furthermore they are aware that talking to the right person at the right time is key to getting the right kind of information. The primary value of networking mentioned during the interviews is summarized in figure 1.

The results indicate that the true value of networking lies in the efficiency of your network – challenges or problems that project managers face will be trivial opposed to having no network at all. Then it should be easier to make decisions in order to deliver a successful project. Therefore networking can be seen as highly valuable to the project manager.

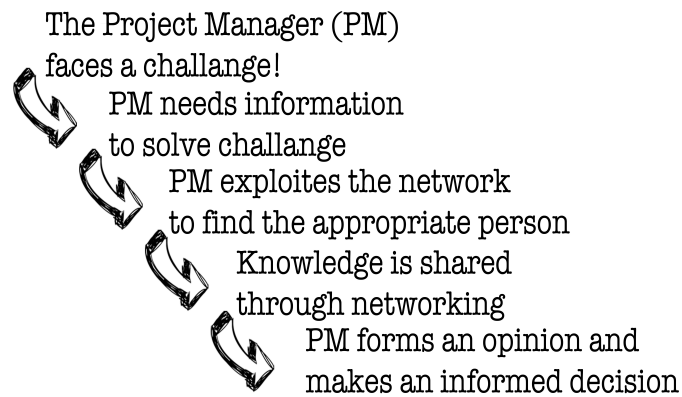


Figure 1: The project manager networking process

4.3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT NETWORKING SUCCESS

The collective outcome of data from interviews indicate that if project managers network effectively, it could affect projects in time saved, reduced cost, lower risk and better quality which in the end might lead to greater project success. Figure 2 presents important issues that could lead to project success, created from participant's answers.

Project time

To deliver the project within the defined timeframe the project manager (PM) needs to have the right people on the team. Networking can be very valuable when it comes to identifying a qualified individual to fit in the team.

In the end, it is much more cost efficient to communicate with the people in your network that you know, by experience, can deliver.

+ Project cost

To deliver the project within the defined cost the PM needs to have the right people in the project team. Networking can be very important to create the most efficient team.

Networking can aid PM to find more efficient solutions.

The one who has efficient networking may be able to cut external cost regarding various project fees.

+ Project quality

PM can ensure quality by networking with people with known skills and experience, - especially when it comes to expertise knowledge.

Quality can be described as successfully delivering the project. By being able to select team members from the network you may ensure quality.

+ Project risk/uncertainty

For projects with high uncertainty it is crucial to have efficient networking. By consulting with people in your network you can more efficiently identify risk.

It is possible to reduce risk by involving people you know that can deliver. If there are people you do not have experience with a new risk could emerge you might want to get rid off.

The more information you get from networking, the more knowledge you might possess. This can lead to more capability to identify risk.

= Project management networking success

Figure 2: Project management networking success

4.4. WHEN NETWORKS MATTERS THE MOST

Participants implied that networks matter the most to project managers at the beginning of a project, at the start up and/or planning phase. The data is in accordance with PMBOK that states that networking can be a useful technique at the beginning of a project (PMI, 2013) and Rory Burke's findings that project management can heavily affect success on the first stages of a project. Especially when decisions have been taken and the end product is defined. The cost of making changes gets higher parallel to the project maturity (Burke, 2003). The key to successful project management is preparation and planning, as well as communication throughout the whole project

(Ingason, H.P., & Jonasson, H.I., 2011). The participant's mentioned for instance the value of networking in the first phases as being the following:

- To get a sense of the project, its size and scale.
- To create stronger project foundations.
- Negotiation bargaining gets easier.
- To select team members for the project. A key factor in a successful resolution of a project is to have a great team.
- To select organizational management system.

So why does the first phase matter that much to the project manager? The data points out that when project managers are in latter stages of the project life cycle, there is usually something unexpected that happens. In those instances, network developed in early phases can help resolve uncertain issues. The project manager should be better prepared to resolve challenges.

4.5 HOW PROJECT MANAGERS USE THEIR NETWORK

Information given in the interviews indicates that project managers are aware that efficient network brings them useful information and they exploit that connection by contacting the right person at the right time. Participant's collective notes on networking usage are as follows:

- Networking is a two way "information street" and you cannot receive information without sharing information.
- Project managers tend to use networking ties with someone who is responsible and trustworthy.
- Project managers are very selective of who they choose to include in their network because when it comes to networking they rather think of quality than quantity.

- Project managers are not afraid to “make” their way through their network to find the right information.

Some of the interviewees talk about the importance of being well connected in their organizational hierarchy because of important information. Otherwise the project manager would metaphorically be like a closed and concealed island of information, not being able to seek information outside of the island, and not getting any visitors with new information to share it with.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section the interpretation of results will be discussed, reasons why networking should be implemented and ways for the project manager to exploit networking more effectively.

Networking has been used by the project manager as a tool to getting right information when needed. Results of this research indicate that project managers have a common general knowledge about networking but lack the knowledge of how to use the networking tool in an effective and structured way. The key thing to enhance networking is the awareness of the concept – by being aware of it, project managers will seize every opportunity of communication to strengthen network ties and evaluate importance of each particular tie.

It is evident that project managers should further enhance their networking tool by organizing it in ways that better fulfill project success. Project managers could for instance structure their networking by how much attributes a person has with regards to for example information, knowledge and networking ties. Subsequently project team members would examine networking outcome and learn from them. This kind of networking analysis could be done in the beginning of every project parallel to stakeholder analysis. To not only to get information on who could be important to the project but also on how to exploit networking by finding out if or where knowledge gaps exist.

5.1. WHY NETWORKING SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED

Figure 3 presents top five reasons for why networking should not only be implemented but also put more emphasis on. It was created out of results from research participants.

- 1 Networking can enhance knowledge**
The more efficient your networking is, the more capable you are accessing what matters the most. Whether it is information, advice or access to specific knowledge.
- 2 Networking may bring opportunities**
The most efficient network will obtain the right connections at the right time. You never know when networking will deliver because you cannot exploit it beforehand. Networking can lead to the dream come true project.
- 3 Networking can reduce risk/uncertainty**
In projects, it is inevitable that project managers (PM) can face challenges they could not predict. Networking as a tool can help PM to respond quickly with the right information.
- 4 Networking may increase project success**
Networking makes the PM more efficient in every way. Which ultimately results in better quality, saved time and lower cost.
- 5 Networking can help selecting the right project team member**
Networking can help with selecting the right project team member. The team can be vital to complete projects in an efficient way.

Figure 3: Five reasons why networking should be implemented.

5.2. PROJECT MANAGER NETWORKING EXPLOITATION

Figure 4 was created out of answers given by research participants and it presents ten reasons how the project manager could exploit his networking in a more effective way.

- 1** When you meet up with people with certain knowledge that might be useful later, try to add them to your network. Try to be open to new links to your network. You may never know if it will become handy later in projects.
- 2** Try to strengthen your networking ties by enhancing your communication skills. Thereby you will be more capable to communicate with people and making sure that people want to communicate with you.
- 3** To maintain and nurture effective networking the project manager needs to work hard keeping the connections up and running.
- 4** The project manager (PM) constantly needs to be aware of the benefits of networking when communicating. Whether he/she is in a meeting, on a conference, writing email etc.
- 5** The PM needs to realize the potential of exploiting the network of his/her fellow project team members. Because they may know people that might come handy one day. The project team could print out the organizational chart and mark who they know and what asset they could bring to the table. This act could enhance the networking awareness of the group.

- 6 The PM can keep track of the networking party by using various tools such as organizing the email, keeping business cards in folders and by using personalized relationship tools as for an example, fivehundredplus that is created as an extension of the world largest professional networking tool, called LinkedIn.
- 7 Show up early before meetings for an informal discussion with fellow project team members. The project manager should get a sense of what direction the project is going.
- 8 The PM can attend more organized events or social group events and should be aware and look into fields where there is a knowledge gap in the network. Especially when you take on a new project on a field you are not familiar too.
- 9 Reduce stimuli. There are so many people who network for the one reason to grow their network, by being seen as popular. Keep the people around you that matter the most and nurture that kind of connection.
- 10 Project managers could use the fundamentals of networking as a add-on to the stakeholder analysis. By doing so you are not only identifying the most important parties, you are also looking for information/knowledge gaps to fix.

Figure 4: Project manager networking exploitation

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study was limited to the following objectives: To make project managers more aware of how valuable networking is for project success as well as finding ways to be more competitive and network more effectively.

In this research all participants agreed that networking is valuable and could be a greater key to project success. Building an effective network takes time and hard work but can pay off greatly – it is a “you reap what you sow” kind of thinking.

Cobb’s paradox says: “We know why projects fail, we know how to prevent failure. So why do they still fail?” (Carl, J. W., & Freeman, G. R., 2010). The author hopes that by covering networking from the project manager’s perspective, he can give valuable insights of how networking might help, not only to prevent failure by reducing risk but also to make projects more efficient when it comes to time, cost, and quality. Part of the solution, of preventing failure, is to nurture and be selective when adding members to the network. Most importantly, networking can serve as a communication tool for project managers – whether it is information, advice or accessing specific knowledge.

Future research might include a greater mean with larger amount of participants to get a more significant result. Further, it would be interesting to analyze and map up

the ones who project manager rely on and exploit the most. By doing so, the field of project management, could obtain knowledge of what individuals and/or sectors could be the most valuable to the project manager.

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