

Project Manager

versus

Program Manager

Same role, different names?

It depends - Swipe to see more

In a perfect world...

Project

- **Tactical** execution of pre-defined plan
- **Fewer components**, smaller scope → fewer changes, less integration
- **Integrates upward** to program and business needs
- Project priority, high level milestones, and resources are defined outside of project.

Program

- **Strategic and Tactical** execution of pre-defined plan
- **Many components** moving together → constant changes and integration
- **Integrates horizontally** across projects and operations, **upward** to business needs
- Adjusts project plans, milestones, and resources, based on program and business priorities and risks.

What this means for the roles...

In a perfect world...

Project Manager

- Interfaces directly with people executing the work; may be more “technical”
- Monitors progress of individual deliverables, technical and operational risks
- Typically reports progress to the Program Team
- Adjusts project activities to mitigate technical risks and project delays, without impact to other projects

Program Manager

- Interfaces with project managers, functional leads, and upper management
- Monitors integration risks and demands on resources, and program milestones
- Typically reports progress to Upper Management
- Adjusts project plans, milestones, and resources, based on program and business priorities and risks.

But in the real world...

In the real world...

- “Project” vs “Program” may be used interchangeably
- Program Managers may be expected to also do Project Management for multiple projects within the program
- Corporate initiatives and operational activities are not considered projects (e.g., enterprise software implementation, manufacturing scale-up, technical support for on-market products)

What can you do about it?

What can you do about it?

“Project” vs “Program” used interchangeably

Option 1: Path of least resistance and most flexibility

Don't worry about terminology and titles.

Make sure that the Project/Program manager role and responsibilities are clearly defined for each Project/Program.

Option 2: One size fits all

Standardize terminology and titles across the company to either “Project” or “Program”.

Option 3: Hierarchical/Progressive

Define “Projects” versus “Programs” across the company.

Define roles and job titles for Project versus Program managers.

Structure career ladders for progression within and between Project and Program roles.

Swipe for more...

What can you do about it?

Program Managers expected to also manage projects

Option 1: Find the unicorns

Some people can handle the multi-tasking, context-switching, and scope-switching required to do both roles simultaneously.
Find them, hire them, and compensate them accordingly.

Option 2: Don't sweat the details

Remove some project management responsibilities.
Examples: taking meeting minutes, updating detailed timelines.

Option 3: Leave the details to technical leads/teams*

Shift at least some tactical project management responsibilities to technical leads and/or other team members.

*This can backfire - [see how](#)

Swipe for more...

What can you do about it?

Corporate initiatives and operational activities

Option 1: Treat everything like a project

Assign project managers to each activity, above a certain threshold of size/time/budget/business value.

Roll up corporate and operational projects under relevant programs. Prioritise and resource them like you do for products in the pipeline.

Option 2: Establish formal processes for integration and communication between projects/programs and operations

Regular check-ins between Project/Program Managers and Operations.

Phase gates to include review of impacts to operations.

Manage resources (people, budget, equipment, etc) across programs and operations.

Did you find this explanation useful?

Share These Slides!

Got other advice for structuring projects and programs?

Leave a comment!

Want a slide deck version of this content?
Leave a comment and tag Saniya Fayzullina.

See more at <https://sanity.consulting>

Email info@sanity.consulting for a free consultation to see how project management can help your organization