

The Heart of Project Governance



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As most Project Managers will confirm establishing effective project governance is a challenge in any organisation. There are several well written, informative, texts that outline the framework, sharing common principles of structure, roles and reporting but, reflecting on my own experiences, I'm struck by the insufficient consideration given to the human aspects.

Ultimately governance is about making good decisions in a timely fashion but, as anyone who has facilitated a project governance board will attest, this is far easier said than done. By their nature most governance boards want to avoid making difficult choices, they are looking for the project team to circumvent potential obstacles. Governance board members are busy people making critical decisions daily. They need the governance meeting to provide positive affirmation; reassurance that the project is on track and in good hands.

Where does this leave the project team? Well, the response is not to hide the truth or down play critical issues. It's an easy step to put the onus on the project manager, make them responsible for ensuring that the governance board works effectively. Although this will ensure the process is facilitated I believe it overlooks a fundamental point; good governance requires both emotional and analytical insight; a heart as well as a head.

To best address governance board member motivations needs an understanding of both their personalities as well as the wider company landscape they operate in. The Project Manager cannot ascertain this all on their own, they need a leadership insider; they need the help of the **Project Sponsor**.

Project governance succeeds when the Project Sponsor is an active participant, challenging the Project Manager on performance and not waiting for the governance board to ask the tough questions. Project governance succeeds when the Project Sponsor and Project Manager interactions are robust, constructive and the communication frequent and unhindered. Project governance succeeds when the Project Sponsor and Project Manager have an effective strategy for managing the key personalities both in and outside the project governance board.

It is the pivotal relationship that shapes the project experience but as with any successful partnership it takes commitment and a desire by both parties to make it work. Project governance without this relationship at its heart is likely to suffer a cardiac arrest.

About the Author: Mark has +20 years' experience in delivering complex, global business transformation programmes within the Pharmaceutical industry including manufacturing capacity optimisation, major system deployments and manufacturing facility acquisition and integration.

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