

In this Lucid Thought, we return to further explore the idea raised in the Lucid Thought 44. In this we debated the pros and cons of organisations requiring Project Managers to have domain knowledge and experience, i.e. do construction projects need civil engineers, do IT projects need business analysts or programmers, do pharma projects need medical professionals etc?

Our conclusion previously, was that the central issues in the debate were ones of gaining the credibility and confidence of stakeholders quickly. On the upside domain knowledge provides a short-cut to respect from others as **'they must know what they're doing'** because they have worked in the business for years and on similar projects. On the downside, the Project Manager and their organisation may be lulled into thinking that the domain knowledge will get them through without developing the whole tool-kit of professional skills and practices that great Project Manager's undoubtedly need. The domain experience question poses a real dilemma - a double-edged sword.

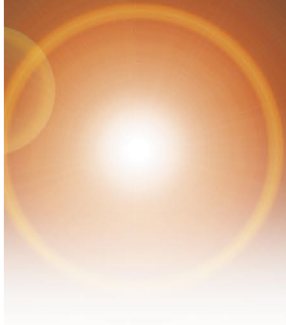
We are reminded of this as one of our clients is facing just this problem at the moment. They have a group of Project Managers who they need to act as Project Managers; planning and controlling the work and engaging and influencing stakeholders to achieve a successful outcome. There are other resources in place that can be used to delegate any tasks that are **'technical'** in nature; if the Project Managers are willing and able to delegate to them.

What happens in practice is that the domain expert Project Managers believe that they are too busy to plan properly and that it is quicker and more effective to do tasks themselves than to delegate

to less experienced people. In this situation their projects become largely personal undertakings and they are over-worked, stressed and (in some cases) in danger of burning out. The excuse often given is that **'we don't have enough time to manage the project properly'** and if **'the management'** want this to happen then we need more time to do so. In reality they have enough time but not to do both the **'doing'** and the **'managing'**.

This situation is compounded by the dominant motivational profile within that organisation. Using the diagnostic developed by the pioneer of workplace motivational thinking, David McClelland (1917-98), the organisation find that the vast majority of their people, including the ones in project management roles have a dominant motivation for the achievement of tasks. This is as opposed to motivations relating to affiliation with people, or relating to using power to change situations.

There is vast academic literature supporting McClelland and his contemporaries' work on this subject that has also permeated the popular business press including the work of authors such as Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee. The general consensus is that a task achievement motivation to work is essential for entrepreneurs and people who drive business growth but that the delivery of business change through projects also requires plans, governance and relationships to be established so that the leader enables others to contribute and achieve. This type of work may not be best served by a domain expert with a strong task achievement motivation. In such a situation that person can **'do it themselves'** and is often motivated to do so.



In these times where Project Managers are in great demand, and where organisations are often desperate to recruit competent people, there is a compelling logic to recruiting people who know the business, know the work that has to be done, can do the work themselves, and are motivated to achieve what the organisation wants. It is a powerful and quick route to getting work done. This does not mean however that the organisation has recruited competent Project Managers who can lead diverse teams to achieve complex undertakings to create value.

On many occasions in the development work we undertake we have used the phrase **“Project Managers don’t do any work”** - half jokingly, but half seriously to make the point that the work associated with project management is the Project Manager’s primary role.

Maybe it is time that the message in this phrase was adopted and Project Managers concentrated on managing the work rather than doing it themselves. If this were the case domain knowledge and a primary motivation of task achievement would be less valuable than a motivation and ability to engage with project players, to delegate to and support other project resources and to proactively lead others to task and project achievement.

Companies like ours are engaged in helping organisations see the impact of their recruitment and reward policies on the development of project management competency. In times where there is a massive pressure to get work done to keep abreast of customer needs and the competition; the desire to put in place project managers who can do and like doing the work themselves is compelling in the short-term but is unlikely to be a satisfactory longer-term option without other interventions and investments.

Awareness of what is happening and exploration of alternative ways of working is the essential first step to moving forward for individuals and for organisations. We all have personal preferences

that are not **‘right or wrong’** but left unmanaged they drive our behaviour in ways that may not be ideal.

**So, for individuals;** if the ideal we seek is great project management then maybe we need to look at where our preferences and skills are leading us away from that and where we could develop and grow?

**And for organisations;** if project management is key to your future business success then maybe you need to look at where incentives are provided and make sure that recognition is for great project management, not just great task accomplishment by domain experts?

**The Three Thought Worlds**

**What are your primary motives?**



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