

# PM Career Development

Owen C. Gaden



“In this era of constant change,” says Owen Gaden, “you must make the commitment to continuous improvement and development of your job-related skills. You should not only take advantage of opportunities offered by NASA, but should actively seek outside

and even nontraditional professional development opportunities.”

The goal of his presentation on strategies and resources for project management career development was for each participant to take “personal ownership” of one’s career development and “commit to acquire the skills you need for the future.”

He began with a study of “changing times,” noting there has been more change in the global economy in the past two or three years than in the previous 25 years. Government continues to reinvent itself with new paradigms such as new ways of doing business. Instead of a linear career path from the bottom to top, in one organization, many are seeking “portable careers” based upon developing skill requirements and following fast-breaking career opportunities.

The project management career, Gaden says, is a balance of expertise: technical, managerial and, for the best PMs, leadership. Today there are two parts to the PM job: tasks (what the job consists of) and competencies (what it takes to do the job in an outstanding way). “A systematic approach to development should concentrate on both,” he notes. “The more complex the job, the more important the competencies.”

In a nationwide survey of 27 core competencies, project managers favored people skills over technical knowledge. Functional managers ranked “technical expertise” first, but PMs ranked it 21st. First on the list for PMs was “a sense of ownership/mission” that functional ranked 17. The other wide discrepancy was “political awareness” which PMs ranked 4, and functional managers ranked 21.

In addressing PM competencies, Gaden suggests critical incident interviews (with a focus on competencies demonstrated on previous jobs), on-the-job feedback, 360-degree feedback instruments, and training and development exercises such as case studies and computer simulations. Career resources include libraries, training institutes (such as the Albert Einstein Institute on Cape Cod), one’s own Agency training opportunities, academia, consultants and vendors, and especially professional associations. He noted that the top ten percent of leaders read a book a month while the top one percent read a book a week.

Gaden mentioned three professional associations for project managers. The Project Management Institute (PMI) offers certification, publications, conferences and networking. The International Project Management Association (IPMA) is a network of 26 national associations with a world congress set for June 1998 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Project World usually offers a June conference in Washington, D.C., and a December conference in Santa Clara, California. PMI’s Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) covers nine knowledge areas: time, cost, quality, scope, human resources, procurement, communication, risk and, most recently added, integration.

However, most new learning for career development takes place on the job. According to a Center for Creative Leadership study of 191 executives (616

<u>Competencies</u>	RANK ORDER OF IMPORTANCE	
	Program Managers (N = 128)	Other Acq. Professionals (N = 225)
Sense of Ownership/Mission	1	17
Long-Term Perspective	2	6
Managerial Orientation	3	2
Political Awareness	4	21
Optimizing	5	5
Results Orientation	6	8
Systematic Thinking	7	3
Innovativeness/Initiative	8	11
Focus on Excellence	9	9
Action Orientation	10	10
Relationship Development	10	14
Coaches Others	12	12
Proactive Information Gathering	13	15
Strategic Influence	14	23
Creativity	15	3
Self Control	15	13
Interpersonal Assessment	17	18
Collaborative Influence	18	16
Critical Inquiry	18	24
Positive expectations	20	24
Technical Expertise	21	1
Interpersonal Sensitivity	22	22
Attention to Detail	22	7
Assertiveness	24	20
Efficiency Orientation	25	18
Directive Influence	26	26
Competitiveness	27	27

Figure 8. Survey Validation of PM Competencies

events and 1,547 lessons), nearly half of the lessons learned came from Challenging Assignments (48%), especially in the fix-it phase. Three other areas were split just about evenly (17-18% each). Significant others such as mentors or role models was one category. Hardships was another, especially business failures or mistakes, missed job opportunities, subordinate performance problems and career change. The third area for optimal career development, according to this one survey, included Other Events such as training, early work experience and purely personal experiences.

Dr. Gadeken concluded that leadership skills, not management, are the key to a competitive edge in the challenging project management workplace of the future.

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