

News service

Project Management

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

Five hands-on strategies on how to lead successful projects
as a project management team of two

Build Trust – and then Focus on the Common Goal

Summary: More and more businesses turn towards dual leadership for projects. Instead of one 'soloist' two project managers run the project together. Through this strategy the project profits from the combined expertise, experience and personal abilities of two project managers. Dual leadership is especially useful in complex projects requiring a wide range of specialist skills. Five practical strategies work towards successful cooperation in what can otherwise be a tricky leadership situation.

Over months the important million dollar IT project was going nowhere. The project manager and his team of specialists were tasked to introduce a new material management software. However the head of the material management department was blocking the project. He rejected all ideas and plans, and criticised applications as not user-friendly enough. His main gripe against the project manager was that he had too little understanding of efficient material management. After five months the executive team decided to start over and relaunch this loss-ridden project with a dual leadership team. This time someone from the material management department was sent to become one of two project managers.

In leading projects organisations go against the principle of the lone warrior at the helm of the project more and more often and appoint two project managers instead. Such leadership tandems can lend a fast pace to a project. "Dual leadership really pays off with complex endeavours that

News service

Project Management

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

require a broad range of specialist skills as well as several departments collaborating closely”, explains project management specialist Gábor Vozári, consultant at next level consulting. In such cases a team of two leaders is much better at managing differing expectations, merging diverse expertise, and advancing the interests of the project. Also as a team the project managers may combine two very different sets of competencies, for example technical expertise and management expertise or analytical abilities and communications skills.

Gábor Vozári explains five strategies that allow a team of two project managers to avoid the downfalls of such a tricky partnership:

1. Develop the right inner attitude

Successful dual leadership teams in projects are usually characterised by the respect they garner from their clients, staff and other stakeholders. They become role models for their teams and they speak with one voice when it comes to the project. That’s why it is important that both managers that form part of a leadership team respect each other and can depend on one another. This is especially true for crisis situations. Will the project managers stand as one even when they are not of the same opinion? Does executive management have to make decisions in controversial cases – and can their partnership withstand such pressure? What happens if one of the two project managers is much more in the lime light than the other during specific project phases? “For such a partnership to work both managers need a lot of social skills in dealing with each other”, says Gábor Vozári, “They do not have to become the best of friends, but they should know how to respond to their colleague’s strengths and weaknesses in a fitting way.”

News service

Project Management

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

2. Focus on the common project goals

Project managers forming a dual leadership team need to act as partners and work towards a shared goal. “This sounds trivial, however often the two project managers work more against each other than with each other,” explains Gábor Vozári. For example during conflict the tandem leaders should keep their eye on the common goals – and not fall into advocating the goals of their respective departments. Successful project managers in dual leadership positions don’t just take up one viewpoint, they discuss varied interests. Here is an example: One of the project managers demands to apply tried and tested project methodology for their upcoming project. The reasoning that “we have always done it this way” won’t really help the discussion. It is far better to explain for which reasons specific processes should be kept in place. What is also useful is to change perspective: Which goals make sense - from the point of view of the client or that of the organisation? This offer up much more useful information than speaking from one perspective only.

3. Determine responsibilities

Responsibilities in a dual leadership role need to be clearly defined. For example in a software project the two project managers should decide which tasks, processes and decisions fall into the role of the IT project manager and which responsibilities should be taken up by the colleague from the other department. However, in practice dividing up responsibilities is not always simple. Project management specialists like to gain a better understanding about their own project by looking at past projects, at their structure, phases, tasks and approaches. With this first step they work towards a good overview. Next they determine which tasks lie ahead for them and allocate them according to their roles and responsibilities. With all this planning project managers

News service

Project Management

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

should be careful not to commit to structures that are too rigid. Gábor Vozári recommends to retain a certain amount of flexibility. “Successful tandem leaders allow each other some freedom. This allows their work relationship to breath – in a sense,” he explains.

4. Understanding the “other side”

A characteristic for successful dual leadership is that the project managers don't just know all the ins and outs of their own domain but they also understand the basics about the partnering department. A project manager should have a good feeling for which project details concerning his own department have relevance for his colleague's work. In addition the two project managers must be smooth coordinators otherwise the project will sink into chaos. Communication processes should be planned meticulously. Which questions and issues do they need to align on? Which information needs to be passed on? How often will they meet? Which communication channels – like emails and video conferencing – should they use? However, this communication plan should not turn into restricting bureaucracy. “The two project managers should be open with each other and ask themselves repeatedly if their current way of doing things is still useful”, says Gábor Vozári.

5. Practicing the partnership

Partners in dual leadership roles need time to get to know each other. Only then can they really understand and appreciate each other's way of operating. The challenge here is that projects tend to take off quickly. In the real world there is often too little time to build a robust work relationship. To keep the peace project managers often shy away from an open conversation about controversial issues. Specialists say this is a mistake. Trust is gained especially in constructively discussing problems or divergent interests.

News service

Project Management

- Ideas & Content for Editors –



Project managers should just not go for the really big issues and conflicts right in the beginning. Gábor Vozári recommends to start by tackling the smaller topics like work processes. As a next step the two project managers can seek solutions to controversial technical issues and learn how to tackle problems side by side. “This way they will become a really strong leadership tandem”, says Gábor Vozári.

About next level consulting:

next level consulting offers consulting services for project and process management, change management as well as for the development of project- and process-oriented organisations. With more than one hundred experts next level consulting is working for companies in diverse sectors, mainly from the IT and telecommunication industry, machinery and plant engineering, industry as well as pharmaceuticals, mobility and logistics, banks and insurance companies. In addition, the business that was founded in Vienna in 2000 is conducting consultancy projects in the health sector, in public administrations as well as NGOs. The business consultancy operates branches in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia, Croatia, South Africa and USA.

Further information regarding next level consulting is available under www.nextlevelconsulting.eu.

For direct enquiries please contact Raphaela Bel
Tel.: + 49 228 289260, raphaela.bel@nextlevelconsulting.eu

This article may be published free of charge – please send us a copy for our information.