Chapter 81
An Exploratory Study of the Current State of Career Development for Project Managers in the IT and Other Industries

Yang Fan
Western Carolina University, USA

Michael Thomas
Western Carolina University, USA

Yishi Wang
University of North Carolina, USA

ABSTRACT

Critical to project success and job satisfaction of project managers is effective Human Resource Management (HRM). The temporary nature of projects has changed the traditional career paths for project managers and the way project-oriented companies prioritize their motivation tactics. By conducting a survey to explore a general pattern of employers' HRM practices in different industries regarding the project management career, this paper presents the fact that most employers prefer on-job training to organizational career path in motivating and retaining project manager and that there is no difference between IT industry and other industries in terms of the extent of use of on-job training and the organizational career path. These findings contribute to an in-depth understanding of the project management career path and suggest that project managers be proactive in adjusting to change in the workplace by being more autonomous in their career development decisions based on the larger work environment.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, projects have increasingly been recognized as a platform for organizations to manage their dynamic environment (Sense, 2011; Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011) within which project manager's lead temporary teams for the timely, efficient and quality accomplishment of defined goals (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2007). However, the project management profession is more often defined by an accumulative description of temporary tasks (Huemann et al, 2007) without considering its unique nature which can be shaped by the dynamism of the project context and by the employers' human resource management (HRM) practices.

In many traditional line management organizations, functional managers see their position as a stepping stone for a higher-ranked position in the organization (Parker and Skitmore, 2005; Pinto and Kharbanda, 1997), and the organizations may provide a career path for those managers to boost their job satisfaction and job security in exchange for their high performance, commitment and loyalty. However, in a dynamic project context, the HR configuration is constantly changing, as is the relationship between the company and the project managers (Huemann, 2007).

Consequently, a career path for project managers within most modern organizations is neither well-defined nor well-understood, and the question of how to ensure the project managers well-being and job satisfaction is unanswered. Failure to address this issue may damage efforts to improve a project managers' performance and can lead to the loss of valuable project managers. From a project managers' perspective, failure to adjust their career paths to a rapidly changing environment can cause psychological and behavioral problems, job dissatisfaction, and a sense of insecurity.

In a setting where individuals perform most of their activities in multiple temporary projects there seems to be an inherent tension between the need of organizations for dynamism and temporariness and the need of individual project managers for a promising and a secure career. Therefore, it would seem that the increased use of project-based structures in modern organizations requires these organizations to not only manage projects efficiently but to also handle HRM in a way that ensure responsiveness to the requirements of the more dynamic project context and the people in it (Bredin, 2008). Only in this case employees will actively live the project management profession, contributing to the success of an organization.

While a lot has been done with respect to proposing various career paths for project managers, quite less is known with respect to real-world employers' HRM practices regarding the project management profession (Dolfi and Andrews, 2007), and the impact of project nature or industry type on those practices. The objective of this research is to explore the extent of project management career paths by investigating prevailing HRM practices in various industries. By comparing the extent to which organizations use an organizational career path and an on-the-job training program and examining the impact of certain industry type on organizations' choice of motivation mechanisms it is expected that the findings of this study will provide insight into the prevailing state of career path availability for project managers. Further, it is expected that this study will provide some general guidance for project managers to fit themselves to a more dynamic project management profession.

The paper builds on different streams of research from human resource management and project management to summarize career path models for project managers. The research methodology and two hypotheses are then discussed and the hypotheses are tested. The main findings are presented and discussed and the paper concludes with the implications of the findings on the project management profession and general guidance for project managers to align individual career development with the dynamic environment.

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