



Chapter XV

**Social Responsibility in IS/IT
Project Management**

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Project managers obviously have a responsibility to manage their projects. In this chapter we explore the question of social responsibility of project managers. We take it as given for purposes of this chapter that the project involves information systems and/or information technology. Social responsibility implies something beyond technical responsibility (the project, when completed, is technically efficient and reliable and meets the project specifications).

In this chapter we will use the stakeholder approach, which is common in discussions of business ethics and the role of business in society (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Evan & Freeman, 1983) to identify various groups to which project managers have social responsibility. We will discuss the difference between legal responsibility and moral or ethical responsibility. We will use a rights and duties approach to apply principles from business ethics to the problem of identifying project manager responsibilities. After this general discussion, we will identify five specific groups to whom IS/IT project managers have responsibilities. For each group, we will identify the project manager role or roles which connect to the rights of the group and discuss the duties which those rights impose on project managers. In concluding the chapter, we will briefly consider how the duties or responsibilities of project managers can be viewed in a positive light as opportunities which most employees and many managers do not have.

THE STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

The stakeholder approach (Freeman, 1984, 1995) is often used for determining the responsibilities of a corporation, but it can also be used to analyze the responsibilities of a project manager. Stakeholders are defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, 46). Thus, for a corporation, stakeholders include employees, customers, regulators, suppliers, lenders, and other groups. The notion of stakeholders was introduced to widen the view of corporate responsibility beyond that to the owners or stockholders (Jones, 1995). There is some evidence that corporations with greater social awareness also have better financial performance (Barney & Hansen 1994; Berman, Wicks, Kotha & Jones, 1999). Applying the approach of identifying a project’s stakeholders, we can begin to identify the individuals or groups to whom a project manager owes responsibility.

Perhaps the two most obvious groups to whom the project manager owes responsibility are, first, the employer who has commissioned the project and, second, the employees who work on it. If the project manager is an employee of the organization for which the project is being done, then the project manager owes the same responsibilities or duties that are owed in general by employees to their employers, but additionally owes specific duties as a project manager. If the project manager is a consultant or other outsider who is directing the project under some sort of contractual arrangement, then the duties owed to the management of the company for which the project is being completed (the project sponsor) are somewhat different from those of an employee to an employer. In this case, the project manager also has duties to his or her employer (unless the manager is in the position of a self-employed consultant). Whatever the project manager’s employment status, he or she also has duties or responsibilities to those working on the project under his or her direction.

A third group of stakeholders comprises those who will subsequently have to maintain and improve the code involved in the project. Needless to say, this could involve programmers working on the code years from the time of the project. While less visible than other stakeholders, this group is also important.

The fourth group of stakeholders involves the financial supporters of the project sponsor. In a corporation, these will be the stockholders of the company. For a public agency, taxpayers are the ultimate financial supporters. In either case, someone has invested or paid money with an expectation of results.

The fifth group of stakeholders, users of the completed project, might include employees of the company for which the project is done, customers of that company, and workers at other companies which have interfaces with the completed project (for example, projects involving B2B Internet usage have wide user involvement). If the project is being undertaken for a public sector organization, such as a school district or police department, segments of the general public might be users in this case—parents of students, employers of school graduates, victims of criminal activities.

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