



Another great tool from the

## ... ‘Developing project management performance in a sea of change’

The tools and training available to project managers are extensive and comprehensive – and yet issues remain. Typically, in organisations handling large numbers of projects, there are those project managers who perform extremely well – and those who are less successful – see the table for the results of recent research on this topic. The question of 'why the difference' can often be explained by experience, the nature of the projects assigned in terms of their difficulty and volatility, external influences and so on. But what of the occasions when the difference cannot be explained?

Commonly, all projects managers in any one organisation have been trained to a similar standard, often through common training programmes. These are generally about the technical skills needed for planning and managing projects. Often, these project managers have access to the same 'bodies of knowledge'. In which case, there has to be some other explanation for the differences in performance. There is considerable evidence from recent research that suggests that the key differentiator is the interpersonal skills of project managers and, in particular, the sub-sets required for influencing and negotiating. The key application of these skills is in influencing business relationships across organisational networks.

There is still a residual question about 'influencing whom'? The conventional approach to this question majors on the assessment and management of stakeholder relationships, but still leaves an important question on the table - how to assess project managers' skills in this key area? For there are two difficulties to overcome, that equally conventional self-assessment or self-reporting models cannot handle. The first is the question of complexity. Think about the check list of possible stakeholder relationships illustrated below -

A moment's reflection will suggest that each project manager in a large firm will have multiple working relationships with many people who fall into the categories in this list. Moreover, many of those relationships will be shared with other project managers in the same firm. Add to this the fact that those working relationships will themselves be volatile. The networks that exist, therefore, are complex and may largely be hidden, as many of the relationships will be informal rather than formal. As many of these network relationships will be common to highly successful project managers and others who are less so, there is no simple solution to assessing where the relationships are helping drive project success and where they are not.

The second difficulty is validating any analysis – a major limitation of self-assessment models. Given both difficulties, it is easy to see the size of the challenge in identifying the real differentiators of success in managing projects. Fortunately, there is now a solution.

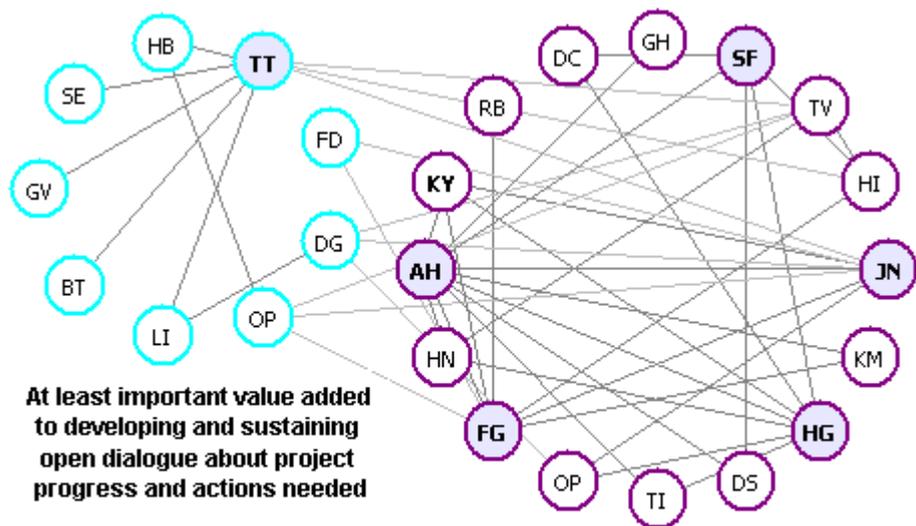
Project Performance *	
Abandoned	9%
Behind schedule	35%
Over budget	69%
Under-deliver	54%
* Source: Computer Weekly	

Customers	Management	Partners
Shareholders	Other contractors	Suppliers
Investors	Community	Employees
Government agencies	Regulatory bodies	Other departments

## Magus Networker and complex networks

Magus Networker was designed specifically to illuminate complex, informal networks so that they become understandable. Graphical displays enable interpretation through dialogue shared by the members of the networks illustrated. Powerful querying functions enable key patterns to be identified quickly, illuminating where opportunities for improving performance can be developed.

Magus Networker uses a 'double-ended' query. This produces automatically-validated relationships, as network links are only drawn if the data provided by both ends of each dyad conform to the specification set out in the query used to define the working relationship. This characteristic of Magus Networker completely bypasses the issue of validity involved in all self-assessment models. Moreover, input data are not processed in any way - just displayed in a variety of charts. This puts the information provided beyond challenge. Even where major surprises are uncovered, the networks presented are simply representations of the non-processed data provided by respondents, hence stimulating valuable dialogue to identify why the network relationships have emerged.



Note dominant style of Project Manager TT in pale blue (project team) group. Compare with many lateral links in second group. Note also good links between the groups

## The Project Management Application

The Magus Networker project management application uses a web-based questionnaire that has two main sub-divisions. The first targets the conventional 'technical skills' of project planning and management. The second targets the key interpersonal skills involved in managing the network relationships required for success in delivering projects – on time and budget. The first set of questions was derived from standard works on project planning and management. The second set of questions was taken from important research into why some individuals have higher levels of influence, in group settings, than others. These, taken together, cover all the key enablers of success in project management, and provide the information necessary for both analysis and development of higher skills, and hence improved project delivery performance.

The standard Magus Networker process model involves a series of workshops attended by all respondents to the questionnaire. Open dialogue is used to explore the maps depicting the working networks that have been discovered. Through that dialogue, the enablers and disablers of project management success are uncovered in a highly supportive environment. The dialogue then goes on to agree the developmental actions required to raise the bar in project delivery performance. Developmental actions plans are always prioritised and, since the plan is their own creation, receive active support from all the people who need to be involved.

The whole Magus Networker process is fast – very fast. From kick-off to action starting is measured in weeks not months. So, if you wish to improve performance in delivering projects, act now. All Magus Networker needs to help you make the change is a little management commitment. The process and people engaged with the process will do the rest.

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