80. View from the C Suite - Part 1

Roger Collison, Jeffrey Goldman, Tom Klaff, Ken Loy, Jeff Mascott, Erin Pitera, Jeff Powell, Pat Sheridan, Trevor Wilby, Steve Williams

Erin Pitera: Our most successful PMs come with a consulting background and approach first, and then been trained on some of the PM techniques, and then they are highly, highly successful.
.
Jeff Powell: Yeah, I mean, our most successful project managers are going to be those that get the highest performance ratings from their customers. And sometimes that's not exactly tied to meeting a schedule and delivering a product.

Trevor Willby: You've got to have a vision for what you're leading, you've got to know where you're going. You've got to understand what the end game is. And then you have to be able to communicate that to your team, to ensure they know where they're going. And then you've got to organize and manage your way there.

Tom Klaff: It's risk, you're managing risk. And project managers have to be the ultimate managers of risk.

Jeffrey Goldman: It's obviously very important to be able to have the repeatability,

Jeff Mascott: So I have to feel like that I'm respected for being the crazy entrepreneur and the things that I bring to the table, and the PM, I have to respect them for being able to map it all out and make it all happen.

Kendall Lott: Our audience knows about project management, and they know how they fit into it. But what they don't know is what the boss of bosses wants from them. So they know what their colleagues say, they know what their PMO leader tells them to do or gets them engaged. They know when they're being asked to learn Agile and Scrum, or a Waterfall development, or whether it's a service-oriented thing. People are learning and growing in that space and getting fired up by it. But I think they're not seeing a reflection of... "Okay, that's great that you're learning all of this and you're following the rules and you're maximizing your business value and your technical knowledge and understanding leadership concepts." But here's the deal, you work in an organization that's ultimately influenced greatly by people sitting at the top layer. The executive, strategy layer, who have certain expectations about how their organization's run. So it's important to hear what executives are looking for from you. Here's how they're experiencing you. Here's what they've liked; here are some examples of what they didn't like, you know?

So it's actual real reality guidance from people who actually own the problem of, "I have things I need to get done, and sometimes I have people who run projects for me, and I'm really glad when they do X, and I'm less glad when they do Y, and here's where I see problems." This is the real instruction, I believe, a person really needs.

Announcer: From the Washington DC chapter of the Project Management Institute, this is PM Point of View®, the podcast that looks at project management from all the angles. Here is your host, Kendall Lott.

KL: Hey, PMs, welcome to our first of two episodes from the C-suite. The C-suite point of view. That was me in that last clip setting up the conversation with one of our guests about why this episode is so important.

Many of you project managers are well-schooled in the basic tools. You've been certified in one or more disciplines. You attend seminars, conferences, trainings to beef up your PM tool kit. But in a recent episode of PM Point of View®, one of my guests mentioned that it would be really helpful for PMs to hear from executives, the team at the top. What is it they really need from their PMs? I turned to 10 executives from a range of businesses – software, construction, kitchen appliances, R & D, consulting, defense, to find out. For this episode, I posed two basic questions: "When did you first encounter the concept, the field of project management, and therefore discovered you needed them?" And, "What do you want from your PMs?" Which of course gets to the underlying question, "Why do they matter to you?"

Well, I got an earful. So grab a pencil and be prepared to write down at least one thing you suddenly realize that the suits want from you. Here we go – straight from the executives' mouths: the views of PMs from the executive suite.

Erin Pitera (04:00): I'm Erin Pitera, I'm the CEO of FMP consulting, and we're a management consulting firm, but we really specialize in strategic human capital management. And in particular, I'd say the intersection of people, processes and systems to make organizations operate more effectively.

KL: So tell me, first of all, when did you first run across project management?

EP: I do think as we started as an organization, the projects that we did tended to be a little smaller in nature, right? And project management was always inherent, right? We were in consulting, we were a service organization, you have to manage the project, you had a project manager on every single project. Our project manager tended to be the person that really led the client relationship, led the vision and the technical approach, and managed the budgets and the scope and the detail. They led the overall engagement was the project management person. We never really disconnected them from, I'll just say for right now, from the technical subject matter.

As our projects grew, I would say we started to get more exposed to what I'll just call, and I'm not an expert like you, but more formal disciplines of project management: the certifications and…that was starting to be required on the work that we were going after. And so we certainly started to see much more in terms of all the various tools, whether it's Waterfall and Scrum and Agile and all the various tools that you might apply to a given situation. And I would say it became a much more formal part of our engagements and our bids and our client work.

KL: What was the shift that caused you to see the formalization, I'll say? The recognition that there were methods and disciplines? Did that lead, and then you changed how you did projects? Or was it something about the nature of your organization or of your client base that changed and required you to do that?

EP: I would honestly say we resisted it for a little bit. Like we resisted the change, we didn't always see the value in some of the more formal techniques, and more focus on process than really like the consulting and the client and the problem-solving that our consultants were really trained on anyways. Now, I don't say that today, I just think we were resistant. We were kind of…We do this really well. We've always been really efficient, understood the technical, understood the client, really knew how to get to the end result, know how to manage scope and everything. And can we get people that really understand in greater depth some of these tools that... How does that add value versus adding…

KL: …Overhead?

EP: Yes.

KL: Does this sound familiar? We're too busy doing real work to mess with that stuff, that's just a bunch of overhead.

EP: Yeah, and I think it's a complete bias. I'll just admit that we had a bit of a bias against it. And I think over time, we recognized the value of some of those techniques, the real efficiencies that lie within them. We started to see some really effective PMs. So we've become very particular about the types of PMs that we look for, the types of skills that we really look for that we think can have a greater impact. So, like I said, I think that's where we came from, and I think recognizing our bias there and realizing the value-add that it can really have.

KL: So the trigger was from the client side. So that was how you got dragged into it. And that's actually the big picture for people in business, right? We have to do the work for the people who are paying. We have to adjust for what our environment is.

Jeff Mascott (07:57): My name is Jeff Mascott, and I'm the CEO of a strategic communications firm called Adfero. We're based in Washington, DC. And I'm still the majority owner and a founder of a software company, also based in Washington DC, which provides CRM for elected officials. So instead of Customer Relationship Management, it's Constituent Relationship Management.

So I think along the way, as our company grew, at some point, some of the projects that we're working on for clients became so kind of unwieldy and hard to manage that we had some folks on our team who said, Hey, you know, we need to hire somebody who's a skilled project manager, somebody who knows how to look at a particular project, break it down into all the various parts, think about how they link together and have all their dependencies, and then put together a plan and manage the team through from beginning to end.

KL: When they said that to you, what was your response?

JM: Well, Kendall, I am somebody who is an executive, but in many ways, people would characterize me more as an entrepreneur. And what that means is, I've got all the crazy characteristics of an entrepreneur. I don't really inherently know how to manage projects well. I like having the flexibility of being able to go one direction one week, and then shift and go another direction another week, and nobody knows what the priority is, and I only get excited about new things, and so a lot of things I start, you know, the ball gets dropped.

So when I first hear "project managers," and when I first started working with them, they were a hindrance. They were the kind of person who is inflexible and doesn't allow me to mismanage my way through life. And so my initial reaction was really... I think I was probably pretty resistant, and in some ways, they'd speak a more language to me.

Roger Collison (10:13): My name is Roger Collison, I'm the CEO of Beracah Homes in Greenwood Delaware. We are a custom builder that uses modular technology to build a house to about 60% complete. And then we GC the projects in the field with our project managers, and what we call site supervisors, and they manage the subs, the trades, and complete the house and turn the keys over to the home owner.

KL: You're going to have to tell us what GC means.

RC: General contractor.

KL: How did you first experience the concept or the context of project management?

RC: It really happened in 2013, when we were a wholesale company only, and we were just running the factory. And we didn't look at it as project management. We looked at it as a manufacturing process. So in 2013, the economy was struggling, and we ended up becoming our own customer by turning to retail, meaning direct to consumer. So we would then build the house to 60% complete in the factory, and then finish it on site. That's when we first hired project managers to do the traditional construction on site and manage sub-contractors.

So our site supervisors do not call themselves project managers. If I were to tell them, and recently just started sharing with them some instructional videos on project management and the terminology that's utilized, these guys are construction guys, and they would just say, I'm a builder. I'm a construction specialist, or something. They wouldn't use the term project management, and they don't necessarily think in those terms. So it's been a training process here, fairly recently, where we know we have to get a better handle around the projects – scope, the budget, timeline and reporting. Because it's just been... Hey, I've got eight houses in the field; I've got to finish eight houses. And so they don't use the terms of dependency. They don't use those types of project management terms, dependencies and critical path, and these are all new terms for them.

KL: Why did those help you though? So let's take the cynical view that, okay, they've been doing it and now we're giving them a bunch of labels, and they're like, "That sounds like a bunch of book learning on labels." You've got a new management idea. Why do those concepts matter, that you bring them forward now?

RC: Accountability, visibility for management, and customer expectations. So the customers are... Their experience is not nearly as good when we haven't helped define the start, the end, the steps in the middle, and kept them informed when delays happen. So their experience has to be improved. At the executive level, myself, my president, we need dashboards or reporting to know how we're doing, how we're performing. Are we moving the needle when we're trying to implement cost savings measures, as well as stay on schedule? And how many we're going to close by the year end? And that kind of thing. So we've got to have reporting.

And then for them, we want to help train them so that they can get control of their day and not feel so helter-skelter – I know that's not the technical term – but they feel like they're managing… and we *are* increasing production, so we're throwing more at them, and not giving them the tools so far that they need to keep their sanity. We want to help train these guys in project management so they can get control of their day, and actually work probably a little less hard and get a little more done, and hopefully don't get burnt out

KL: This discipline, if I understood you correctly, has improved how your customers interact with you; it's improved how you as an executive understand what's happening – the flat-out reporting side, if you will, the information flow side; and you're seeing it that it actually helps your builders become people who have more control over their projects, can use your time better, actually may have to do less work, even.

RC: We are in desperate need of better project management, so... Yeah, so we can be a guinea pig.

KL: Do you have a sense that it has lowered the helter-skelter nature of things?

RC: Absolutely, we require the Project Managers to be on-site here at the office every Tuesday, the whole day, where normally they would be out in the pick-up trucks, running job to job, doing what they do the other four days of the week. But we've required them to actually sit at their desk, actually in a group, in one room. And that's where they plan, schedule. They can also talk about the projects across each project manager's plate, because they're sharing subcontractors, right? So sharing resources. And that gives them an idea of "Why can't Joe be on my job on Tuesday?" Well, it's because he's finishing up a job for you and won't be done till Friday. And without that, they had very little, if any visibility into their subs' schedule. And the subs were feeling like... "This guy called me and said, 'You know, I need to be there Tuesday,' but then a half hour later, another person from the same company says that they need me the same day or the day after …" So it has helped clean up some of the chaos.

Jeff Powell (15:55): My name is Jeff Powell, I'm the CEO of Strongbridge. We do software development and IT services for the federal government, as a federal government contractor. So it's really super challenging for our project managers. They have to have a lot of different skills. They have to be technical, they're usually coming up through the technical ranks. But they have to have people management skills for managing the personnel on the contract. They have to have customer service skills, because they're sitting right next to the customer. And most times it's not even one customer. We'll have the CIO organization of a government agency hire us, to develop software for program offices that are across their organization. So we have to answer to the CIO organization who are managing what we're doing, but then answer to the requirements and the customer support of the end customers, which are sitting in program offices somewhere else, that could be across the country.

So our project managers, my gosh, they have to have management skills to be able to manage the people, the projects themselves, you know, earned value, scheduling, budgeting of the projects themselves. They have to worry about the financial management of our contract, which is different than the actual software development project. You're talking profit and loss now. And then they also have to be able to manage the expectations of their customers.

So all that's happening all at the same time. Oh, and I forgot the technical part. I mentioned they

have to be technical because they have to understand what those technical people that work for them are doing. And they have to be able to explain that to the customers, and they have to be able to make promises that can be kept – budget and schedule, all those kinds of things. So yeah, the project managers in our business have to be Jack of all trades, and I highly respect them.

KL: But you said, now we've moved past like earned value management, management of the project itself and its finances, but rather its role in our profit and loss. So that's hitting at this idea that the project you've been assigned, with the resources you've been given, actually produces value, both for your client, but also for you from the executive level. You're expecting that they are profitable in what they do. Can you tell me something about how you have positioned project managers in the actual business operation, that the meaning of the business, its own profitability…?

JP: We tend to ease them into that side of it, profit and loss. So in our business, we're fairly small, we have a CFO, they keep track down to the penny on every single project, what we're doing. So we hold reviews all the time. And those reviews will be... We'll have a technical review, but we also need to have... we call it more of an administrative review, but it's mostly financial. The other parts of it would be contractual. When is our contract ending? Those kinds of things. Recruiting. What openings do we have and when we need to fill them? Or how are we doing filling them?

But the financial review part of it, we found that our CFO will fill in the blanks for the project manager as we're mentoring them, as we're bringing them along. The more senior project managers can do that on their own and keep track of that along with doing everything else I've been talking about. The people that are newer to project management, that's the one area where we feel like we can shield them a little bit and take care of that for them.

KL (19:15): Do you find it easier to take an engineer and make him a project manage? A person with an MBA and make them a project manager? Or get a project manager that you have to teach how they're going to experience the technology and then the business side of this?

JP: If you've got the right project management skills, and the customer service skills and the people skills, you can learn enough technically to be able to manage the project, as long as you have some basis of understanding of what's going on. That's kind of... I've evolved into that viewpoint, where I think I can take a really good manager, a really good person who has been around IT, and been around technical projects, and put them into a project management role and have them be successful. But it's pretty rare to find a technical person with the personality that you need to be able to manage a customer and manage people. You could teach people how to do personnel management, you can teach people how to do discipline and how to set expectations for employees, and make sure that they're performing properly. You can train them on all that stuff. But the personality part of it, of being able to work directly with a customer on a day-to-day basis and develop that relationship, and be able to keep them happy and satisfied with what our company is doing for them, that's a whole different ball game. It's really hard to train someone in personality type issues. So my expectations of someone, and it's got to be high, I'm sitting in a corporate office and I've got my project managers out in the field working with my customers. My whole business is based on those project managers keeping those customers happy.

KL (20:42): What are some of those characteristics of that relationship management, what is it that somebody needs to know other than we are trying to delight our customers and keep them happy? Let's break that down a little bit.

JP: So the project manager has to be able to manage the expectations of their customer. So we have budgets and schedules and things go wrong all the time. So the question is, at what point do you get the customer involved? What do you tell them? How much detail do you go into to make sure that they feel like they're being kept up-to-date on status all the time, yet they're not being deluged with detail? How can you make sure that they're engaged in the project, yet they don't feel like they're being overly called upon to do things that they don't think is their job, they think that's the contractor's job, they hired the contractor to do that? And it's a pretty fine line. To be able to do that and be able to not only be able to manage those customers' expectations, but get the support of your personnel or your staff to be able to do that without micro-managing and learning how to delegate to your staff. Be able to get all that done all at the same time.

KL: As you become more mature as a project manager, we typically think of…that means you'll have bigger projects. But there's a suggestion in some of what you're saying is, one level of complexity might be the level of customer integration. In other words, it's not only size that matters here, of the project.

JP: Yeah, I mean, our most successful project managers are going to be those that get the highest performance ratings from their customers, and sometimes that's not exactly tied to meeting a schedule and delivering a product. It's personal. Sometimes it's...What do they think that you did right? And were you managing problems and issues as they came up properly? And even though, if the schedule got delayed, were you doing everything that you could to keep the project moving along? It's what the customer's perception of that project manager is, and it's the project manager's job to keep that perception positive.

So some of our most successful project managers aren't necessarily the ones that can develop software on time, within budget every time. It's the ones that can manage those projects to a point where the customer is extremely satisfied with what they're doing, in which case, they're going to give us more work. This project manager is going to get more tasks under them, they're going to possibly manage more than one project at that point. Those are the successful project managers.

Steve Williams (23:10): Steve Williams. And up until January this year, I had the job I always aspired to, which was leading a company. So I was CEO of a defense company that I was able to grow in four years to become a top 100 global defense company.

The most important and the hardest role in the company, critical to the company's success, are the project managers. They're the center of all the stakeholders, and it takes a special person to be a proper project or program manager. Because they have to balance everything, from supply chain to quality, to dealing with the sales guy, the customer, and their boss and each other, because they're always competing for scarce resources, the best engineers, especially if they're on a tight schedule. And they always are. If they're not on a tight schedule, you put more on their docket. Right?

KL: You make it tight.

SW: And a good program manager is always being called on to do more.

KL: But you just say it, right? Project managers, don't ever think you're going to get ahead because if you're that good, they just need to give you more.

KL (24:27): What did you need the project management class to *get* to be effective in that role?

SW: Almost all my project managers were engineers. Started out as an engineer. So technically oriented, so they're very comfortable in the weeds. But that's…as they progress and get promoted to be a project manager, they have a lot more responsibilities. They're more in a leadership position, putting all the pieces together. So two things that I found I'd have to instill in them: One is the financial piece. You have your own ledger, you have to keep this program on budget. And if you can improve it, then the company should, like they do sales people and others in the organization, have an incentive there. Because it's just not on-time delivery at the quality needed, it's got to be at the right margins. You have to have a viable business.

The other is: communicate. Engineers aren't the ones that you normally see in the choir or in the marching band, or they're a little bit more introverts. They have to be an outward personality that the customer not only trusts, the customer likes them!

KL: From your executive perspective, how did you want to be reported to when there were problems or opportunities from a project manager or program manager?

SW: Well, and this is the tone that management needs to set. You've not only empowered, but you've enabled them to do their job, given them the right resources, but you trust them. So PMs, when something happens, take the lead. Execute. Do the right thing. And if it doesn't go right, I'm not going to nail you on that. It'll be a learning experience. So sometimes the PMs will get blamed for everything and be called to the carpet in front of the boss. That's not the right way to do it. They're in charge, that's their program, they report on it. And if there's things that go wrong when they come up and report, not just what, how they've been proactive. What do they need? Here's the following resources; if I'm going to solve this by next Tuesday, this is what I need from you.

Jeffrey Goldman (27:00): So my name is Jeffrey Goldman, and I am the CEO of GoldSentinel. Our firm is an insight discovery shop. We analyze data from online sources and provide services to help our clients make better decisions.

KL: Tell me how you characterize the value of project management.

JG: So in the software world, it's obviously very important to be able to have the repeatability. And so if you've got the mechanics down of how you were successful in a client engagement with an understanding of what they needed, a design of how you could meet their needs, a delivery for some automated process for them, you want to be able to replicate that. And so the skills that you learn and that you follow allow you to bring those same process steps, that level of rigor, and bring that to the next project and to be successful.

KL: How rigorous do you find it? I'm trying to figure out how it compares to other systems that you've had to learn, for example, from an engineering background or computer science background.

JG: When I think a lot about the rigor, I think about the steps, the cycle. And so following the different stages, you can identify when those stages are occurring, or when do you move on to the next stage, or have you met the gates and requirements? And so not unlike in a software project, where you're doing your different pen testing and repeatability for proving that what you created is

going to do what it says. It's a similar way of thinking about the project management steps, and what you're doing is, when you're going from analysis and understanding and delivery, so all of these things can be treated with a routine and a repeatable process.

KL: Yeah, that's important for I think a lot of project managers to hear, is that the applicability of what they're learning is pretty broad. And it's interesting to hear from your perspective, as an executive, you knew immediately, it sounds like, that you could use that sense in other places in your company.

JG: Absolutely, and that attention to detail. All of the parts that you learn in the project management training, you can go down to very low level of details to ensure some accuracy, or to get some repeatability, whether it's in the scheduling or the requirements or the feedback, all of those different things. You can tune the framework so that you can get the value you need for that particular project.

Roger Collison (30:20): We can build 110-120 homes this year and make zero, or we can build them and actually make a good margin, and it really does come down to how well the project managers are performing, because 50 cents on every dollar of our company goes through their fingers. The other half is at the factory level, which is still a project, but some of the manufacturing tools, like Lean manufacturing, we put in place, help us control those costs and efficiencies. Out in the field, again, 50 cents on every dollar goes through their fingers, and it's five guys. So five guys are going to handle $8 to $10 million worth of budget, and inefficiency is going to have large ramifications financially.

KL: It'd be interesting to see, I bet it would be viewable, too, observable, is "What is the value impact of having imposed project management?"

RC: My president and I, we think that there is a $1 million opportunity here. 110 homes. We think there's probably 10 grand to every job that if we manage it, bid it, project it, less re-work, less errors, more efficiency, we think there's a $10,000 per home opportunity here.

Erin Pitera (31:53): So an expectation for us is that project managers are really bringing critical thinking, I guess, to the engagement. And I know there's a lot of talk about that in project management theory as well, But, again, I don't think it's always done. So if we get one where we're just getting the same process that we did on last year's engagement essentially, right? "Here it is, it worked last time." So here is our same timelines and steps and everything, without really asking some of the critical questions up front, making some of those assumptions, because we just have this repeatable process. I think we really do have an expectation that our PMs bring that critical thinking to the engagement throughout the entire engagement.

Again, I think our expectation is really that they very much focus on the end result and the customer: the customer relationship management, and the why, and the value that the customer is trying to derive from the engagement. I think in our world – professional services firm, services engagement – we find a value-add in people that really come with consulting skills, a lot of the stakeholder, the people-oriented skills, for lack of a better term, that I might say all the real risk management is their focus, and then training them on some of these PM Techniques that include all of that. Obviously risk mitigation.

But I think where we've seen the other way go, where we've seen PMs that really hone in on process over outcome, and it's more like timelines and scope and cost, really drive everything. And again, that's critical, but there's also the more, I'd say more task-oriented, but the more people-oriented pieces need to be given equal weight. And I don't think they're always given equal weight sometimes from a pure project management standpoint. And the ones that we've found more successful, I think, really give that equal weight. They understand the real outcomes that you're trying to get to. They can hold that in their mind through the entire engagement, what that… they don't lose sight of that "why" over the process piece. If they're valuing the process over the outcome, I think sometimes we lose track there.

KL: Do you have clients that actually want the process as part of their outcome?

EP: I think we have some that actually come more from a project management background, and do highly value it, and I think that's part of what we need to be as consultants. We need – no matter what kind of project we're managing – to understand what our client really values at the end of the day. And I do think we have some that very much value that, and expect that as part of the project. I do think we have others where... I don't want to say they don't value it, they do. They don't really want to see it. They don't want to see the sausage-making, basically, and all the just focus on process. They really want... their attention is focused on the outcome and the delivery, and the stakeholder management and the communication and those pieces. And they want to know there are solid processes behind it. But I don't know how much they really want to see it or talk about it.

We go in, we need to be delighting that client, that's number one. And there's going to be many ways that you might do that. And sometimes a project can still be very successful and it may not have met all the timelines and the budget, and still be an extremely successful outcome.

KL: When you're an agency, you're serving an external client, that's where the value comes from, what they want you to do it...

EP: Absolutely.

KL: …and that's the stakeholder that matters!

EP: That's it, that's the end all, be all really. And being able to navigate that, which I think is sometimes why our most successful PMs have almost come with a consulting background and approach first, and then been trained on some of the PM techniques, and then they are highly, highly successful.

Ken Loy (36:27): So I think it's just fundamentally, it's just solving problems. And that there's no issue that I see at any level, whether it's at the individual project level, it's just trying to deliver a part to a customer, or for me, it is to deliver an integrated radar and a command and control system onto the US Navy ship. There's no problem which only involves one discipline. You can think in every single one of them, is that it's a matter of coordinating people, it's coordinating technology, it's coordinating pricing, it's coordinating schedules. And, you know, there's different levels of complexity, but they are all involved. It's not just a single problem.

My name is Ken Loy, I'm the CEO of Hensoldt, Inc.. Hensoldt, Inc. is the US subsidiary of a German parent company. And what we do is we provide defense sensors and electronics to the US

defense industry, and to other government agencies.

So the question that I often deal with when I turn to my project managers and program managers is, how can you solve this problem holistically? Not just to... so that you optimize in one particular area, but you solve it holistically, so that we can make sure that we maximize the contributions and the benefits across as many different disciplines as possible.

Ken Loy (37:59): No contract that we have ever gets implemented the way that it's written down on paper.

KL: Is that a problem?

Ken Loy: No, because that's just real life. If it *is* a problem for you, then you are not going to be successful. If you think that you're going to be driving from point A to point B, you know, exactly on this route and exactly on this time, you're going to be disappointed. Because there's going to be a road that's going to be blocked, there's going to be traffic that's going to come up, you're going to get a flat tire. And how do you deal with that?

That's what project managers have got to understand about, "How do we deal with these perturbations?" The ones that I think that get frustrated and then their frustration ends up translating across the entire organization, are the ones that say, "But it says here in the contract that you have to do this. You have to deliver this C Drill by this particular date." But if the C Drill can't be delivered by that date because the government didn't provide the GFE or the GFI in order to answer that, you've got to be skilled at discussing with your contracts officer and your government program manager about how you're, together, are going to solve that problem.

KL: So how do you know when your project managers are being good in the sense of... When do you find them being helpful?

Ken Loy: A really simple way to explain that is that if they come to me only with the problems that they can't solve themselves.

KL: If they can be solving it themselves, solve it.

Ken Loy: That's right. They should report it back up to me, and take credit for, hey, here's all of the things that I was able to accomplish with my team. Right? That's great. You need to get credit for that. You need to wave the banner, you know, you need to clash the cymbals, you know, let everybody know that's a great success. We solved this problem.

The ones who are really valuable are the ones that come up and said, "Ken, we've done all of these things. We were able to get this far on the mountain, but we can't get to this last bit because it's completely outside of our control. We've tried to go this way, we tried to go this way, we tried to go this way. And we can't do it because we don't have the resources, because the contractual language prevents us from doing that, because the customer's schedule, there's no way that they can deliver this to us on time or that we...the engineering staff…whatever. Right? The ones that are valuable, the ones that come to me and they only bring me the hard problems.

KL: That makes me think that one of their best competencies will be to be able to communicate to

the executive layer. To be very clear about what is beyond their limit, by design, and what they need.

Ken Loy: That's right. So a lot of that has to do with empathy.

KL: Oh yeah? Tell me about that. You mean with the executive?

Ken Loy: So it's empathy, it's trying to understand is what are the motivations, what are the needs of other people around you? Right? You have to understand about, Hey, what is my CEO trying to do with the company, and how can I help solve his problems? You know? There's this other phrase that... What interests my boss fascinates the hell out of me.

KL: You better believe it. What does my stakeholder want? That's interesting to me.

Ken Loy: That's exactly right. Right? So this is the same thing with your customers too. What is really pressuring you? Why are you saying that I have to get this product delivered by September 30th? Oh, because you've got expiring money? Now I understand. Let me figure out how you can obligate that money by September 30th, and maybe some of these other things are subordinate to that. Maybe it's not delivering the C Drill, like we thought, or maybe a meeting milestone is really important because this meeting milestone that you would have in August would enable them to validate that they've got the prerequisites for the next task order. Then I get it. So really, it's not that I've got to do this thing by the end of September, but I really have got to have this meeting in August in order to get there.

That sort of empathy is really, really important for you to understand about what your stakeholders, your customers need, what your boss needs, and then also what your teammates need.

Trevor Wilby (42:34): You want to look for people who have growth mindset, who understand concepts like design thinking, so they're always solution-oriented, and they're starting from a place of empathy and understanding of what their employees need, what their superiors need, what the customers need.

My name is Trevor Wilby. I run – or own – T-Rex, and I'm the chairman of the board. We're a federal IT contractor. We do large scale modernization projects for the federal government.

Project managers are the life blood of our business. They have a lot of people to answer to, they have to bring a very diverse skill set to the game. So number one is results. You have to get results. I think there's the intangibles. Charisma; you have interpersonal skills. No one wants to work for a drill sergeant. It doesn't mean they won't be effective, but you can be more effective if you can get to the end game without having to be a drill sergeant.

You've got to have a vision for what you're leading. You've got to know where you're going. You've got to understand what the end game is, and then you have to be able to communicate that to your team to ensure they know where they're going. And then you've got to organize and manage your way there. And so to me, those are the fundamental aspects of leadership you've got to bring to a project manager position.

And the other is that they have to be consistent with your culture. And your culture should value

respect and trust, integrity, excellence, working hard, all those different things. And so when you find people who engender, who live up to your culture, promote it and build on it, and they bring that leadership quality, then you probably have someone who's a good fit for having the charisma to step up into that leadership role.

But there's more tangible aspects too. You've got to know project management. You've got to know…and PMP® is a good example of project management in a box. If you know those skill sets, then you have one of the tangible fundamental skill sets for project management. You've got to be skilled at customer service. So you've got to be able to listen, understand what the requirement is, organize, lead and get to the solution. And that can be over a two-month period, it can be over a five-year period. So you're going to have a relationship with that customer, and you've got to be skilled at that.

You've got to service your corporate masters, right? So you've got to make sure that you take their strategy, and you use your project to get to sales and results, right? And then of course you have to service your employees. So you've got to mentor, you've got to teach, and you've got to lead. You've got to grow them in support of whatever the corporate mission is or the customer mission is. You do have to have some understanding of the technical domain in which you're delivering services, or you have to be a quick learner to get the key aspects of it, so that you can manage it appropriately.

Pat Sheridan (45:51): A good PM is so much more than just the foundations of like, yes, we got the web app done. And I feel like this is why such a premium in the commercial space is put on this title.

My name is Pat Sheridan, and I am co-founder and managing partner of Modus Create. Modus Create has four practices, which are Strategy, which is essentially product strategy and user experience; Agile, which is new practices and methods; Cloud which is essentially emerging tech and new architectures, cloud native architectures for building things; and we recently launched a Security practice.

There are certain roles, by their very nature, that are experience-based generalist. You can have specialists, like I'm the best, whatever, tech guy ever, I wrote the book on it. You can have generalists like, Hey, I work on high level systems, I know a lot about, you know, a little about a lot of things, and I can see the forest for the trees. And then you have versatilists, people that kind of operate, can move flawlessly between multiple domains. And these archetypal kind of personas, if you will, can manifest in a lot of things. So when I look at high-value roles, the core individual contributors are the engineers, the QAs, varying degrees of all of those roles.

But around that, you have the folks that, by their efforts, hone and leverage the output of the individual contributors. The PMs, right? And I believe the role of the project manager or the product manager, some of them are interdisciplinary. You come to that role from starting in another place. My experience interviewing folks from the start-up side in the DC community is, it's like small project type stuff, it's like Kanban-esque, and it's a small enough thing where you can almost eyeball most of the efforts and estimates. Then on the other extreme, I've seen people that are essentially really contract administrators from federal contracts, that know that we had to check off all this stuff, but they read a book or got some kind of a certificate on Scrum, but they've never executed it on the ground.

PS (48:06): What I'm seeing right now, in the translation from Waterfall to Iterative to Agile, the discipline of understanding how to document a system, and do UML, and do business process modeling…if someone asks you what the enterprise architecture of something, do you know what those deliverables are or what the template should be? Well, of course, you might not need that in a startup that's a social photo-sharing startup, but you're not a bank with atomic rollbacks and hundreds of millions of dollars moving between accounts. And so certain things that frame out what the shallow end of the pool is on these core defining things, I think, are foundational to the Get-Stuff-Done side of being a good project manager.

Tom Klaff (48:54): My name is Tom Klaff, and my company, Revolution Cooking, designs, engineers, markets and sells innovative cooking appliances to the consumer market.

KL: Maybe entrepreneurs don't do project management.

TK: Well, we don't typically, but we can't live without them.

KL: Oh, oh, that's intriguing. Tell me more!

TK: You know, we're these free-spirit thinkers and dreamers, who advance, you know, do What-ifs, and just are irrationally optimistic about opportunities. But it takes a real discipline to get an idea to market, and I think that's where... It makes all the difference in the world between a great idea that succeeds and a great idea that just doesn't get out of the lab and fails.

KL: So what is that process? Where would you bother bringing in that kind of discipline after you've got your happy feelings?

TK: Well, for us, it's, you know, what is the end goal? And you have to work backwards from there. And when you really break down, at least in our... I'll just give you an example, of just, take getting a toaster to market that's innovative requires forethought and planning on…if we're going to launch a toaster in the holiday season, you've got to work backwards a year to plan all of the engineering initiatives, the operations initiatives, the logistics, the supply chain initiatives, the testing, the certifications, all the marketing programs. It's really very integrated and very detailed. We have massive Microsoft Project schedules across function, not just for engineering, but it's for marketing and for operations and logistics.

Project management is really a make or break skill inside of a company. It keeps the trains running on time, it's accountability for everybody. You need singular focus on just schedules. And then who does what, and all the measuring and reporting, so managing the variables that could go wrong and derail your business. And it's risk. You're managing risk. And project managers have to be the ultimate managers of risk.

KL: But you really want your project managers to know, focus, accountability, measurement and reporting. Tell me about focus. Why does that matter in your environment, maybe relative to another one? What's the value there a PM brings?

TK: Focus on time. Cost aside, but time really is the more costly thing. The critical path. So you can't meander. Time really is valuable. In our case, if we missed a shipment or if we missed a

launch, and we try to launch right before the holiday season, that's where 70% of our revenue is generated. So timing is critical. And missing a week, you could lose a million dollars.

KL: This is so important because we forget that, right? We think the problem was we missed the milestone and that's going to change resourcing or something. But the deal is, is you're going to market. That's revenue that doesn't happen now. When you've had that happen, just in brief, what's the snarl? What's the snafu out of that?

TK: Well, sometimes it's on the invention side, and that just in and of itself takes time. But if we don't have a well-coordinated... Like, if one area of the project drops, and the other makes the deadline, then I think that you have a loss of morale. You have one group who's busted their butt to make that milestone. So managing morale across teams is really important. Because you don't want to get to the situation where, well, that's marketing and they're late. You know, the integration, and that's really where the project manager comes in, the project manager holds people accountable to the schedule.

We have daily stand-ups, and we look at the schedule every single day, because things can change every single day. So when we throw up the schedule and everybody sees it, you see where the bottlenecks are, you see where the issues are. That accountability is really, really important. You don't want to get a week out without having these meetings, and then coming across unforeseen issues.

KL: So this is process management, and this is really reading into your reporting. Besides validating that they were project managers and motivated and interested in working in your environment, how would you set up your expectations for them?

TK: So I think having a very P & L-oriented mindset is important.

Jeff Mascott (53:57): What I like about really good PMs is that they have the ability not only to make sure that everything happens – everybody's doing their part, all the details are being taken care of, the budget's being met – but they're also open to changing the plan and improving it and making it better, or even changing the direction of the project when it makes sense to change courses. So they're able to... They're not just rigid in following things toward a bad end, but they're always looking for ways as well to improve, to adapt and be flexible.

JM (54:36): So I have now, over the years, come to love project managers. When I want to get a big project done…I mean, when a project manager's with me, thinking through the project, and they're able to produce these plans and think about all these things, put together all kinds of lists, think about how it all maps together, think about how it all affects the budget, I'm blown away. I think that they are like the most amazing, amazing creatures.

The thing, though, that I really am looking for as well in a project manager, is one who also kind of respects me. As an entrepreneur, what I know I'm good at is being able to see around the corner and see down the road and figure out how we need to adapt and change to do what…with what we're doing now in order to meet future needs. And I feel like the best working relationships I have with somebody who plays the Project Manager role for anything that I'm working on is one where there's mutual respect. So I have to feel like that I'm respected for being the crazy entrepreneur, and the things that I bring to the table. And the PM, I have to respect them for being able to map it all out

and make it all happen. And so when that happens, I feel like we've got balance in the universe and we can accomplish lots of great things.

KL (56:07): Amazing creatures indeed! The good news is Project managers are highly valued. That's right. You bring a special set of skills and leadership to get things done. Of course, you want to be appreciated, but remember, it's a two-way street. You need the folks in the C-Suite as much as they need you. Show some respect and appreciation.

Trust and empathy were highlighted more than once: the better you understand the needs and motivations of your corporate masters, the better you can serve them. Ken reminded us: "What interests my boss fascinates me." In fact, you should really know what motivates *all* your stakeholders. Is it scheduled? A looming deadline? A tight budget? Or impressing their boss or stakeholders?

Some executives want repeatability and some definitely don't. Risk management, critical thinking and problem-solving are key. Executives rely on their PMs to make things happen, and that includes fixing problems and adapting as needed. That's right, you heard it again: adapt. Requirements may change, and you've got to be ready to work with the new flow.

Measuring and reporting are still essential, but don't be tied to process for process's sake. Be aware of P & L (the profit and loss). Projects have an intrinsic value, whether it's for financial profit or a part of a capacity-building change operation. How about Roger? Putting an actual corporate value on the role of project management. Straight to the bottom line! And that's something we should all be prepared to do. Two big parts I heard: internally, it leads to accountability, and externally it was about customer value and meeting expectations. Because execs want your project, because it drives the value *they* are responsible for, PMs need to understand the value of their project, and how it fits into the greater scheme.

At the end of the day, stakeholder satisfaction trumps all. Your budget may be slightly off; timeline, well, maybe there's a little slippage. But if your customers and stakeholders are happy, that is, as Erin pointed out, the end all be all.

I hope you will keep these concepts in mind as you work with your bosses and your teams to guide your projects towards successful completion – beyond delivery to value realization.

Special thanks to my guests, Roger Collison, Jeff Goldman, Tom Klaff, Ken Loy, Jeff Mascott, Erin Pitera. Jeff Powell, Pat Sheridan, Trevor Wilby, and Steve Williams.

Announcer: Our theme music was composed by Molly Flannery, used with permission. Additional original music by Gary Fieldman, Rich Greenblatt, Lionel Lyles and Hiroaki Honshuku. Post-production performed at M Powered Strategies.

KL: PMPs who have listened through this complete podcast may submit a PDU claim, one PDU, in the talent triangle, Leadership, with the Project Management Institute's CCR system. Use provider code 4634 and the title "PMPOV0080 View from the C-Suite – Part 1." You can also use the PDU claim code 4634C7ZD5A.

Tune in to our next episode, the last in our series from the University of Maryland's 2020 Project

Management symposium. Visit our Facebook page, PM Point of View®, to comment and to listen to more episodes and get the transcripts. Leave comments on the projectmanagement.com portal; evaluate us on iTunes; and of course, you may contact me directly on LinkedIn. I'm your host Kendall Lott, and until next time, keep it in scope and get it done.

Announcer: This has been a Final Milestone Production, sponsored by M Powered Strategies.