

Speaking the Language

If one thing is certain in project management right now, it is that the terminology varies from organization to organization and from company to company. So that we have a common vocabulary, I will explain the terms I use. Some of these terms are the same ones used by various organizations and some are different. Today, it can be difficult to “talk the talk” without a common vocabulary.

Based on my experience and research in project and program management, I have found that the field of projects and programs can be divided into seven categories:

- Small Project
- Intermediate Project
- Large Project
- Program
- Virtual Project or Program
- International Project or Program
- Large-Scale Project or Program

In order to manage these seven categories of projects or programs, I have found five levels of skill sets are required. The five skill sets are:

- Basic
- Advanced
- Expert
- Specialist
- Principal

It may be possible to define seven skill sets to match the seven categories, except that the discriminators between the intermediate and large projects are principally those of size and therefore simply require more of the same. The discriminators between specialty projects or programs, however, is a totally different matter. The specialty category is a summary of every unique category of project or program that can or does exist. The Specialist Skill Set is the corresponding skill set required to lead each of the unique categories. In other words, the breadth and depth of the specialty category and Specialist Skill Set are indeterminable but internally related.

The international type is really a specialty. However, it is so unique in its requirements that I have chosen to call it a separate group.

The span of control that a leader is allowed is equally broad. I find that there are five leadership roles in the field of project and program management. These roles are:

- Coordinator
- Supervisor
- Manager
- Director
- Vice President

Interestingly, it is not the responsibility that differentiates the roles. Rather, it is the authority of each role that makes the difference.

In Chapter 4, we will examine the characteristics of the categories, the skill sets, and the roles. I will cross-reference all of them using tables and explanations.

I explained some of the differences in the terminology used for phases, processes, and stages in Part I. Now, I will explain projects and programs, skills and leadership roles, and compare the program categories to the other factors.

Project and Program Types

As I said at the outset, project management terminology varies from organization to organization and from company to company. There is some standardization, but there is a lot of variability as well. If you were to invite all of those who have contributed to the current lexicon into one room and go through the terms that have already been defined, I'm sure you would get good arguments as to why each term is defined

the way it is. I'm sure each has good reasons for being different. I am of the opinion that these terms do not need mathematical precision so long as you and I understand what we are talking about when we are talking.

Earlier, I introduced seven types of projects and programs. These types are distinguished by size, organization, complexity, and risk level.

Many project management organizations use different terminology. By their terminology, essentially everything is a project. A program, by their definition, is a group of projects. I disagree with this definition because a giant leap must be made in the skill set requirements between leading a project and leading a program. A project, by my definition, is accomplished for a customer inside an organization and a program is accomplished for a customer outside the company under a contract.

A Small Project

A small project is led by a project coordinator. It usually involves less than six people, who are of the same or closely related disciplines. A small project is a simple task of low complexity and low risk.

An Intermediate Project

An intermediate project is led by a project coordinator or a project supervisor. It generally involves six or more people, and the individuals are usually of different disciplines. An intermediate project is a task of moderate complexity and low to moderate risk.

A Large Project

A large project is led by a project manager. It generally consists of more than ten people, and the individuals are of different disciplines. A large project is a task of moderate to high complexity and moderate to high risk.

A Program

A program is led by a program manager. It is distinguished from a project by the existence of a legal contract between the company and the customer. A program generally consists of more than ten people, who are of different disciplines. A program is a task of moderate to high complexity and moderate to high risk.

A Virtual Project or Program

A virtual project or program is led by a project manager or a program manager. It is distinguished from other projects by the fact that two or more of the principal contributors (i.e., not vendors) are located in different geographical areas and interface only by means other than face-to-face (i.e., electronically). A virtual project or program generally consists of more than ten people who are of different disciplines. A virtual project or program is a task of moderate to high complexity and moderate to high risk.

An International Program

An international program is led by a program manager. It is distinguished from other programs by the fact that the customer is in a country other than the one managing the program.

There are some variations on this theme however, brought about by how multinational companies do business. Although you would expect an international program to be a program, it may be a project in a multinational company. In this instance, the product is manufactured in the home country and delivered to a branch office (sometimes registered as a different company) in the foreign country. The product is then handed over from the branch office to the customer.

Why this strange twist? This is because only the branch office, not the home office, is chartered to do business in that country. It is brought about by the customer's need to have a local entity to hold legally responsible.

An international program generally consists of more than ten people of different disciplines. An international program is a task of moderate to high complexity and moderate to high risk. Complexity and risk usually refer more to programmatic issues than to technical issues.

A Large-Scale Program

A large-scale program is led by a program manager, a program director, or a program vice president. It is distinguished from other programs by the size and organization of the program—that is, a large-scale program is divided into smaller projects. A large-scale program generally consists of more than fifty people of different disciplines. It involves a task of moderate to high complexity and moderate to high risk. Complexity and risk apply to programmatic issues and technical issues.

Characterizing a project or program lays the groundwork for defining the skills necessary for a project manager to lead it.

Project and Program Skill Sets

I see the need for five skill sets to accomplish the project leadership tasks of today's projects. While I agree with Jim Lewis¹ in thinking that a single person is not a project and that project managers should not have technical tasks to accomplish in addition to their project tasks, I would be amiss if I did not recognize that this is the way a lot of so-called projects are assigned and conducted in industry today. Even though I don't agree with this approach, it is a fact of life, and I have included it in the skill sets I have defined.

The skill sets are:

- Basic Skill Set
- Advanced Skill Set
- Expert Skill Set
- Specialty Skill Set
- Principal Skill Set

Basic Skill Set

The Basic Skill Set requires an understanding of the technical task to be performed and the purpose and content of the project. In fact, all skill sets require this understanding. The Basic Skill Set includes the most basic skills required to conduct a project. These skills are an appreciation of what projects are all about and an understanding and ability to manage the content of a project, to create and maintain a schedule for the project, and to create and account for a budget for the project.

Advanced Skill Set

The Advanced Skill Set includes all the subjects of the Basic Skill Set at an advanced level. Additionally, many other subjects are added to create an understanding of an organization and the skills necessary for people to operate in an organization. The Advanced Skill Set requires an appreciation for risk and complexity. Other skills, such as configuration control and change management, now enter the picture, as does the ability to divide the task into workable units and to establish and track values for those units.

Expert Skill Set

The Expert Skill Set includes all the subjects of the previous skill sets and adds sales, teaming and partnering, proposals, negotiating, business considerations, legal considerations, sophisticated estimating, and more complex metrics for tracking program status. The expert level is more sensitive to management's need for profit and to customer needs in general.

Specialty Skill Set

The Specialty Skill Set contains all the previous skill sets and adds unique and special knowledge for specialized situations. These programs include international programs where specialized knowledge of the customer's habits, laws, and customs are a necessity. The Specialty Skill Set is distinguished by its uniqueness, no matter what it is. Special knowledge is also needed to conduct a virtual program. These are programs where major contributors are located at places that can only be reached electronically, places where there can be no face-to-face contact with the participants.

Principal Skill Set

The Principal Skill Set contains the subjects of all the previous skill sets at a superior level. The manager competent in the Principal Skill Set is expected to know all the "Firm" and "Soft" subjects that apply to project and program management and will specialize in general management. This manager will delegate much of the "Firm" day-to-day activity, such as accounting and scheduling, and spend his or her time in solving problems, expanding the position of the company (selling), and understanding the wants as well as the specific needs of the customer.

Figure 4-1 help you visualize how skill sets apply to project and program categories.

Leadership Roles

Here, I am defining five leadership roles for project and program management. These roles are:

- Project Coordinator
- Project Supervisor

Figure 4-1. Skill sets as they apply to project and program categories.

Skill Set	Project/Program Category
Basic	Small Project
Advanced	Intermediate Project Large Project
Expert	Program
Specialty	Virtual Project or Program International Program
Principal	Large-Scale Program

- Project or Program Manager
- Program or Programs Director
- Program or Programs Vice President

One can argue that two other roles exist, these being project engineer and project lead. However, I consider these as primarily technical roles, and despite their leadership responsibility, not really part of project management. I will stick to my five roles.

Today, industry has begun calling every project leader a project manager when, as you will see, several of these leaders are not managers at all. Nevertheless, management has delegated to them the responsibility of leading a project even without much authority.

Coordinator

A project coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all the established contributing elements supporting a task are available at the right time and in the right order to accomplish the task.

Supervisor

A project supervisor is responsible for the conduct and completion of the project under his or her supervision. A project supervisor has the ability and authority to move resources within the project to ensure

that the project meets its task, schedule, quality, and budget requirements.

Manager

A project manager is responsible for achieving project objectives, customer satisfaction, and project completion. A program manager is responsible for achieving a program's profit objectives and customer satisfaction, and may be responsible for growth of the value of the program. Project and program managers have the ability and authority to move resources into, within, and out of a project or program to ensure that it meets its task, schedule, quality, and budget requirements. A program manager has profit and loss responsibility.

Director

A program director is responsible for achieving profit objectives, customer satisfaction, and growth of the value of the sum of the programs under his or her jurisdiction. A program director has the ability and authority to change program resources and to direct program managers to make changes necessary to achieve overall program needs. Two titles frequently exist within this category: program director and programs director. A program director directs a large or very large program; a programs director directs a group of related programs.

Vice President

A program vice president is responsible for achieving the profit objectives, customer satisfaction, and growth of the value of the sum of the programs under his or her jurisdiction. A program vice president has the ability and authority to determine which program and projects will be pursued and bid, and the ability and authority to establish priorities for the utilization of resources within programs. Again, two titles may exist within this category: program vice president and programs vice president. A program vice president directs a huge program; a programs vice president directs a group of programs.

Figure 4-2 will help you to visualize how roles apply to project and program categories.

Now, let's go on to Part II, where the skill sets will be expanded to show the subject areas contained and how they are applied to projects and programs of varying sizes and types.

Figure 4-2. Leadership roles as they apply to project and program categories.

Role	Project/Program Category
Coordinator	Small Project Intermediate Project
Supervisor	Intermediate Project
Manager	Large Project Program
Director	Program Large-Scale Program
Vice President	Large-Scale Program

Note

1. James Lewis, *Fundamentals of Project Management* (New York: AMACOM Books, 2001).