

## MAKING YOUR CAREER MOVES

There are some jobs where you spend your entire career in the same position. For the most part, these positions are in mining and manufacturing. In most other industries, people move about from position to position and from company to company. This is certainly true in project management. The very nature of project management is that you must move from project to project because projects have a specific beginning and ending, they are finite.

The question in project management is not whether will you move, but how you will move. There are essentially four conditions to move through in the world of project management.

1. Move from project to project in the same company at the same level.
2. Move from project to project in the same company at different (higher) levels.
3. Move from project to project and from company to company at the same level.

4. Move from project to project and from company to company at different levels.

It is reasonable and normal to spend some amount of time in condition 1 above, but you want to move as quickly as you can from condition 1 to 2 or 4. You may have to move through condition 3 to get to condition 4.

First, you must look at your company's usual inventory of projects. Are they all at the same level or do the levels change? If they are all at the same level, that pretty much seals it. For all practical purposes, you will be working at that level at that company for the rest of your career. You will have traded your hardhat for a tie, but you are not much better off than the mine worker. If the projects change in size and nature, it's a different story. In this case, you must vie for a better position.

We spent much of the first four parts of this book suggesting that you improve yourself so that you could improve your position in project management and in the company. If someone doesn't move you, you need to move yourself. You do this by vying for higher positions in the company or by changing companies.

If other, higher positions are available in your company and you have increased your knowledge and performed well, you should be in position to be selected to lead other, higher projects. If you are not selected to lead other, higher projects, you need to know why. The amount of time you spend changing projects at the same level depends on three things. First, what is the duration of the project type you are working on? Some projects last for only a few months, while others last for several years. Second, what "mix" of project types does your company usually have—that is, how many short-duration projects does it have compared to how many long-duration projects? Third, how does your company reward the performance of project managers?

If other higher positions are not available and you have increased your knowledge and performed well, you need to seriously consider changing companies or at least divisions within your present company if jobs are available there. In any case, you need to make a move. The question is: Where and how do I move? Read on.

# Meeting Market Needs

Unfortunately we cannot individually create a market need for a position we would like to have. Instead, we must follow what the markets have to offer. We start the process by assessing the market. What are companies and other organizations looking for to fill their project management needs? We need to know if we are looking in the right places. What direction is the market taking? Who are the companies involved? What are the opportunities we might see in the market? What are the specific jobs being offered? Having digested all this, we need to address the market. That means we need to address the market with what it wants and needs. In other words, how we individually fit the needs of the market. We can set some strategies for ourselves in the process too. We can determine if we want to make the offered position a stopover or a destination, and most certainly we can take advantage of the different vista the new position provides.

Let's press on and capture that new job we want . . .

## Assessing the Market

In part of the research I did for this book, I evaluated 182 current job postings for project managers. The results of the data showed that the most important requirement for all the project management jobs is a bachelor's degree. In some cases, the degree requirement was specific (engineering, finance, and so on). In other cases, it was general. At first I created a table to present the data, but the problem was that it was necessary to average the data. Why is this important? Because when you average data, you lose the individual characteristics of the elements of data. For instance, if a specific job posting is for a junior project manager, most likely the bachelor's degree and one to four years' experience will be most important. Conversely, if the job posting is for a

senior-level program manager, the master's degree and ten to twenty years' experience will be most important. When the data is averaged, all this is lost. So, I decided I couldn't average the data. However, what came through loud and clear in all the postings was the requirement for a bachelor's degree. Experience was very important, but as you might expect, it was directly proportional to the expected compensation level of the job. In other words, the lower-level jobs required less experience than the higher-level jobs. Usually, the job experience requirement cut off at twenty years. Certification, per se, was rarely mentioned. Usually, if certification was required, the position was to be resold—that is, it was a headhunter posting the advertisement for the position, not the company. Performance was to be evaluated by the contents of the resume.

### ***Market Direction***

The direction of the project management market appears to follow general market trends with some exceptions. First, because project management is a new concept, there has been an avalanche of advertising for project managers in the last few years. In part, this advertisement is not so much the creation of new jobs as it is the reclassification of jobs to require the project management process be used in the performance of tasks that have been around for a long time. Second, because the project management process is so powerful, new jobs have been created requiring the use of the project management process. What all this means, though, is that you must have project management training in order to qualify for these jobs—existing or newly created.

Clearly, if the direction of the market is such that job descriptions now require project management abilities, you must have project management abilities. That's the basic point of this book.

### ***The Companies Involved***

The number and types of companies that advertise for project managers have increased dramatically in the last few years. This increase, however, follows the same rationale as addressed in direction, above.

Once this trend started, we began to see companies and industries advertising for project managers that have never advertised for project managers before. Examples are finance and banking, and believe it or not, construction. Before a few years ago, construction advertised for their traditional positions such as foreman and superintendent. Now,

many companies advertise these positions as construction project managers. Depending on your view, you could say that this is subterfuge or that they should have been doing this all the time.

### ***The Opportunities***

The opportunities for project management positions appear both internally, meaning inside your current company (if your company does business using projects), and externally, meaning outside your current company. The process you use to achieve these positions is essentially the same.

Now, let me throw something at you. Outsourcing has had a severe impact on America's workforce. Jobs, at all levels, are being sent overseas. Manufacturing jobs, software coding jobs, analyst jobs, white-collar jobs of all types. White-collar jobs, EXCEPT project management jobs. Why is that? Because the project management process provides leverage in getting the job done, and that's what's needed here.

What does this mean to you? It means you need to get your start in project management before your competition does. Secure your position by becoming qualified in project management.

### ***Job Descriptions***

In Chapter 7, I talked about the value of certification. Here is where you need to make an individual assessment based on the market you are working in. Let's look at the issue from two positions:

*Position 1.* Look at a number of job descriptions (meaning as many as you can find) for positions you would like to have. Has the market segment you are looking into started requiring certifications? How many of them are requiring certifications? If the number is 10 percent or more that are requiring certifications, perhaps this is a portent of things to come. You need to think about a year or two ahead. That's the length of time it will take you to become certified. Can you visualize how many companies in your area of interest will be requiring certifications at that time?

If your market segment approaches that 10 percent threshold at the present time, you need to seriously think about getting a certification.

*Position 2.* Remember when I discussed the two project managers with exactly the same qualifications, except that one has a certification and the other does not? Remember the obvious conclusion we came to? Apply that logic and increase your competitive position by getting

a certification. Which certification you choose is a matter of the demands of the market you are working in.

## **Addressing the Market**

Where to go from here is a question you must ask yourself. In previous chapters, I provided some information that hopefully has stimulated your imagination, and you now have a better idea of where you want to go or what you want to do in the field of project management. At this point, consider three options: First, evaluate this position in light of your overall strategy, then ask yourself: Is this a stopover or a destination? Second, evaluate the visibility that this position affords you with regard to your overall strategy, then ask yourself: Do I have a different view from here? Finally, if you have decided that your present position is not your final destination and your visibility tells you there are bigger and better things out there, then ask yourself: Where do I look?

### ***Is This a Stopover or a Destination?***

Maybe you are now in a position to determine whether the next position you take will be a stopover or a destination. In either case, it is your choice. Hopefully you will make the choice before you take the next position, but that's not entirely necessary. On the one hand, what started out as a stopover could end up being a destination. If you are satisfied with the position you are going into, that's wonderful. On the other hand, if a position starts out as a destination and then you find other opportunities available, that's terrific.

All this may sound kind of wishy-washy, but it's really not. At the outset, you should develop a strategy built on the view you now have. At this point you say: "I want to be a project vice president, and any job is just a stopover on my way to getting there." At the next vantage point you have a different view. You see that staying close to your technical roots is more promising in the long run. If that's the case, shift your strategy a little and take a slightly different vector. When you get to the next vantage point, do the same thing. The point is this, have a good idea of what you want to do and maintain the general strategy. Don't make sharp right or left turns on a whim. Usually, these look real good, but don't pan out too well. Maintain the general course, but don't be afraid to take advantage of a new offering.

### ***Do You Have a Different View from Here?***

Each position you get will likely give you a different view. You are exposed to different people who have different views. These people may

have other contacts and friends in places and positions you had not thought of before. Every day, indeed every cocktail party, every golf match, or every little league game, can offer new opportunities. Just keep your career and your career strategy in mind at all times and keep your eyes and your mind open.

### ***Where Do You Look?***

Before we tackle the “where” question, let’s tackle the “how” question. The answer to “how” is networking. Networking takes two forms: Face-to-face networking and remote networking.

Face-to-face networking is the kind of networking you can accomplish by going to the social activities that your company offers and interfacing with section heads, managers, and directors of other parts of the company that might be interested in what you have to offer. The point is to use this forum to break the ice and set up a follow-on meeting so you can get down to business. I don’t suggest you bring your resume with you to the party, but cards are OK.

Remote networking is accomplished by letter, fax, e-mail, and telephone with companies and people of common interest. You can start remote networking by joining a technical organization, an administrative organization, a management organization, or a project management organization. Almost all of these organizations have bulletin boards, potential employers lists, and numerous other kinds of contacts to get you started. Because the lists are so dynamic, many organizations have Web sites where these lists are posted. The thing you have in common with these kinds of interchanges is that you both have a common interest in the organization that brought you together in the first place. You will need to provide your credentials, your resume, and the other standard documents you usually provide, but you should be able to break the ice with your contacts by referring to the organization that provided the contact in the first place.

Now that we understand the “how,” let’s look at the “where.”

***Project Management Organizations.*** You are looking at an organization to provide you with educational opportunities, training opportunities, book lists, listings of gatherings (seminars and such), networking opportunities, and most importantly, a job listing board where you can post your resume or look at the listings for opportunities.

Figure 2-2 lists organizational contacts no matter what continent

you are standing on. Take the opportunity to contact the organization that interests you most and see what they have to offer. I believe this is good advice if you are a “newbie” or a “grizzly.” If you are a newbie, the organization can provide you with mounds of information to help you in many ways. If you are a grizzly, take a moment to stick your head above the trenches and see what is happening in the outside world. I guarantee you will be amazed. In either case, you will have the opportunities to see jobs posted or to post your resume.

Most organizations have Special Interest Groups (they may call them something else that is similar) that allow you to channel your interests into a specific discipline, industry, or area. The main body provides the standards and the body of knowledge for general project management positions, but the Special Interest Group (SIG) provides a specific interest flair. Most of these organizations have local chapters. You may need to drive a few miles every few months to reach the meeting place, but believe me, it’s worth the effort. These organizations usually have a guest speaker who presents a topic of interest during the meeting. Usually, there is a “networking” period prior to the meeting, so you can move around and meet others. My experience with these local chapters has been excellent. The groups are populated by project managers and potential project managers from all the local industries. They usually run the gamut in age and the industry in which they are employed. The local dues are usually low, and the return on investment in time and money are more than worth it.

***Civic Organizations.*** Next, you can join organizations that stimulate interchange between members. The Chamber of Commerce is a good place to look for organizations of this type. Most of these organizations will have a social hour or period for interfacing that will be of immense value to you. Once again, this is an initial contact situation. Business cards or personal cards are a good way to suggest maintaining contact. Don’t give out a card to everyone you see, but have some in your pocket just in case. Then, just handle the situation as if it’s no big deal.

***Job Fairs.*** In addition to these types of face-to-face interchanges, there are job fairs and expos. Even though job fairs and expos offer face-to-face contact, they are a little different. The usual setup for these events is to have the company representatives at tables around the room. The representatives will be standing at some kind of “parade rest” behind their table wearing a big smile. There must be only one training school



in the world for these folks, because this is the way it always happens. You circulate until something or someone catches your eye, then you swoop (no, you'd better be cool and saunter) over to that table. After about five seconds of pleasantries, you get down to business. The purpose of this interchange is simple—what can you offer me, and what can I offer you? Does this sound like a marriage made in heaven? Oh well, probably not, but it may be a good contact. Answer the representative's questions and ask your own. Be sure to have a good supply of up-to-date resumes and personal or business cards. If you don't know how to write a resume, get help. Read a book or contact a professional service. There's a myriad of books and hundreds if not thousands of resume services to help you, all for a fee, of course. Why? Because just after you turn and leave the smiling representative at the table, your resume goes into a pile, maybe with a few notes but nevertheless into a pile. The next time it is read, you won't be there to defend it, and it may end up in the trash. At this point, the face-to-face networking has turned into remote networking.

***Classified Ads.*** The most difficult way to get a job is through “cold calling.” Sometimes this is the only way open to you, but it's tough. By cold calling, I mean looking in the newspaper or the like and trying to respond to a job posting. They don't know you from Adam's house cat, and you are just another piece of paper. Unless you have some unique qualification they happen to be looking for at that moment in time, you will spend a lot of unproductive, frustrating time pursuing this avenue. The only time this method is really useful is when it is a seller's market and employers are hiring everyone they can get.

So, choose your method. I think the priority of choice should be clear from the foregoing. Always have an updated resume available, and always carry business or personal cards, along with a smile!