

## **Working Cross-Functionally**

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Working cross-functionally poses a challenge for any project manager. Team members have functional commitments and loyalties. Resource managers have functional goals and priorities. It usually falls on the shoulders of the project manager to bridge the gap between managing a project that is cross functional, within an organization that is aligned functionally. (There are management systems that can minimize these matrix problems, but very few organizations have them in place.)

The key to managing your cross-functional projects is gaining commitment from the members of your team and project alignment from the functions. Here are seven tips for making your cross-functional projects more successful.

1. Start your project with clear direction and strong support from your sponsor. Make sure you obtain a charter from the sponsor before you begin project planning. The charter should outline the expectations, limits and priorities for the project. If your sponsor doesn't write the charter, write it with the sponsor or write it yourself and then review it in depth with her. Make sure she signs off on it when you're done. Also, review the charter with each resource manager before you ask him for the resources (people and/or money) you need for the project.
2. Obtain team member commitment to the project by involving them in project planning. Use a project management method that encourages team participation. Participation builds understanding, commitment and accountability to the project.
3. Make sure key resource areas have representation on the team. For key stakeholders that do not have representation, assign a team member liaison to communicate with that stakeholder. Also, create a communications plan for regular communications with all stakeholders. Copy resource managers on all status reports and have team member representatives review project status with their resource managers.
4. When the project plan is complete, review it with each resource manager and have him sign off on it. Approval of the plan signals their commitment to providing the resources as prescribed in the plan. If they refuse to sign, ask them what changes would be required to the plan in order to gain their commitment and approval. Don't begin execution without commitment from the resource managers.
5. Keep project ownership on the shoulders of the project team during execution. This is done by maintaining team participation during status reviews, when identifying and analyzing problems and creating action plans, and when evaluating change requests. When a problem arises lead the team through a process of deciding on the best course of action. By letting them own the problem and develop a solution, they remain committed to seeing the project through to a successful conclusion.
6. Solicit help from your sponsor when you can't resolve problems on your own. She should be in a better position to lobby resource managers to provide support that you probably are. She can also escalate issues for you. Ensure sponsor involvement in the

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project by working with her to create the charter, inviting her to the kick-off meeting to review the charter with the team, reviewing the project plan with her and having her sign off on it, issuing regular project status reports during execution, holding regular project review meetings with her and soliciting her feedback on the performance of the project and on your own performance throughout the project process.

7. Solicit feedback from resource managers throughout the project. Feedback can be obtained through face-to-face meetings and/or through simple survey feedback forms. When using a survey form, make sure you close the loop by reporting back to the resource managers on the results of the survey and on your action plan for dealing with the issues raised.

Working in a cross-functional environment is certainly a challenge but not one that is unmanageable. Try the seven tips listed above and see if they don't help you minimize the problems that emerge from working in a matrix.

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