

PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN TIMES OF DISRUPTION



Sumeet Paprikar | Kaustubh Kumar | Mandar Athalye

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Abstract

Project management is the practice of orchestrating the work of a team to achieve goals and meet success criteria in specified time. Organizations undertake multiple projects that are intended to improve its performance.

Projects by nature are complex with the teams and stakeholders distributed globally. In the event of disruption, there is a need to tweak and adapt to newer ways of working. The disruptions bring in newer dimensions or challenges to the already complex variables in play. This paper explores some techniques that can be applied to keep teams motivated and on track for delivering the project objectives.

Disruptions – Changes the Project Ecosystem

The disruptions have always come repeatedly. They have been Global (e.g. Asian flu, CoVID 19 pandemic etc.) and Regional (e.g., Japan Tsunami Nuclear radiation, Hong Kong Protests etc.).

While there are several examples of severe disturbances and interruptions in the past, current Covid-19 global situation is unprecedented. Governments and medical fraternity across the globe are on their toes to contain the virus and find a permanent cure. Nevertheless, the scenario is not going to be the same for any country, institution or organization post pandemic.

Due to the scale of this disruption the Project Manager and project team are facing different challenges. The collocated teams are not able to interact in person and hence responding to project needs becomes different and important in these times.

Responding in the Times of Disruptions

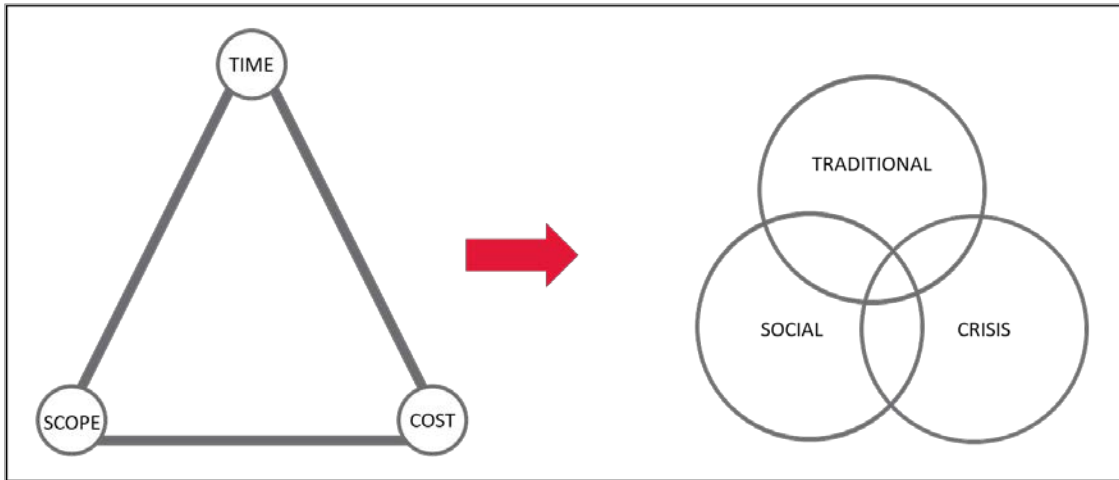
The most important aspect of Project Management is responding to a change or a disruption. The traditional aspects of project management ie Scope, Time and Cost remain important. However, other aspects are added that increase complexity of the project ecosystem. The organization will concentrate on its revenue due to invocation of Business Continuity Plan. Since this is a deviation from the planned path, expenses and costs are expected to increase.

Safety in pandemic situation takes most importance. The business continuity needs to be maintained at the same time. Therefore, the project team and the project manager should work in cohesion to ensure the project delivery and personal health.

The social environment also adds to the complexity. Since every member is working in different social environment, it affects that member to an extent.

The emotional and communal health of the team needs to be strongly maintained. Hence, the usual triple constraints of project i.e.

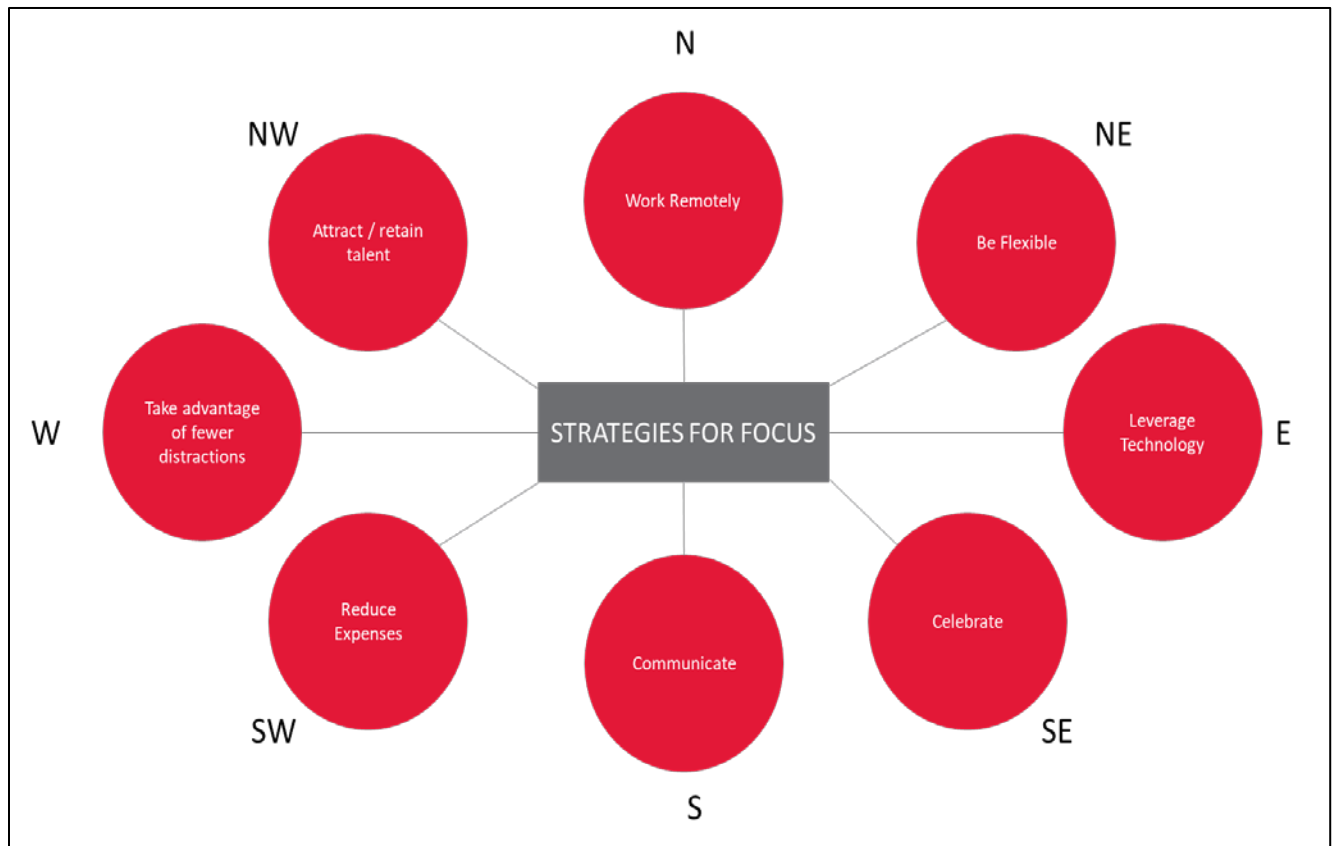
Scope Time and Cost changes to Social Traditional and Crisis



Since the project teams' concentration will now have to be on various new aspects, it becomes important to embrace a new framework to deliver the project. At Tech Mahindra Consulting, we have put together a framework, which is simple yet effective. Over the time, this will become the usual way of working, be it disruptive environment or normal. This framework not only helps handle the disruption but also help focus on delivering on project objectives.

The Framework – Follow the Sun

In simple terms start from East and end in West



Starting with the Sun rising in the East – the project manager should ensure that the team is leveraging all the available tools and technologies. The new tools will ensure the Communication and Remote Working is not affecting the project execution i.e. moving from East to West.

- **Leverage Technology:** The team and Project Manager must use various collaboration tools for effective communication to their advantage.
- **Communicate:** Crisp and clear communication becomes more important in these difficult times.
- **Work Remotely:** Set this as the norm and ground rules for the team to follow.
- **Fewer Distractions:** Look for opportunities that can be explored e.g. team will hopefully have fewer distractions at home and hence more focused.

After the Project Manager covers 4 key directions and they reach a certain maturity level, the team will be capable and equipped to handle difficult situations. The project manager can then address supplementary directions of the project.

- **Be Flexible:** The project manager should consistently organize workloads and resources. They can evenly spread out the peaks and troughs in demand and stagger the start dates of different projects.
- **Reduce Expenses:** The project expenses will be reduced due to better clarity on scope of work and hence reduced overtime required to deliver, by smoothing the workload.
- **Celebrate:** Celebrate even minor achievements/successes that will keep the team motivated.
- **Attract/Retain Talent:** The team has formed a cohesive bond over a period and hence focus on retaining the talent/team members.

With new framework being made available, the project team's approach is crucial to embrace and incorporate the new framework in daily activities.

Benefits of Using – Follow the Sun

The framework provides solid foundation that can be further enhanced to suit needs of the project. This is very important in a client partner ecosystem where clients depend on the partners for project execution. We can look at how this framework can be utilized to bring things under control for IT projects.

Using the framework above, evaluate and adjust certain aspects like

- Communication and Collaboration
- Remote Working and Data Security
- Team Availability, Utilization and Management
- Risk and exposure on various stakeholders
- Financial Impact on both account payables and receivables
- Infrastructure needs and challenges
- Adoption of Incremental and continuous digitalization

At the outset, it may be good idea to reduce the scope or move milestones to a later date, if the financial impacts are not huge. However, if they are steep, the alternatives are needed on priority so that the teams and project outcome is not compromised.

We will focus on the top 3 aspects listed above

- **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Gartner suggests the 10x10x10 rule must apply in any kind of difficult situations i.e.

“Say something 10 times in 10 different ways for people to retain 10%”.

When the team is working remotely, it is more difficult to maintain effective communication compared to a co-located team. There is no water cooler, no bumping into colleagues in the hall, and no cafeteria to stop by. This can lead to employees lacking the information they need to do their jobs effectively and feeling a bit disconnected from rest of the team. In these situations, it is crucial for Project Managers to ensure that the team is engaged and focused. It Project Managers to provide clarity and ensure team members have necessary information for completing their project work. Project Managers can accomplish this by applying following strategies:

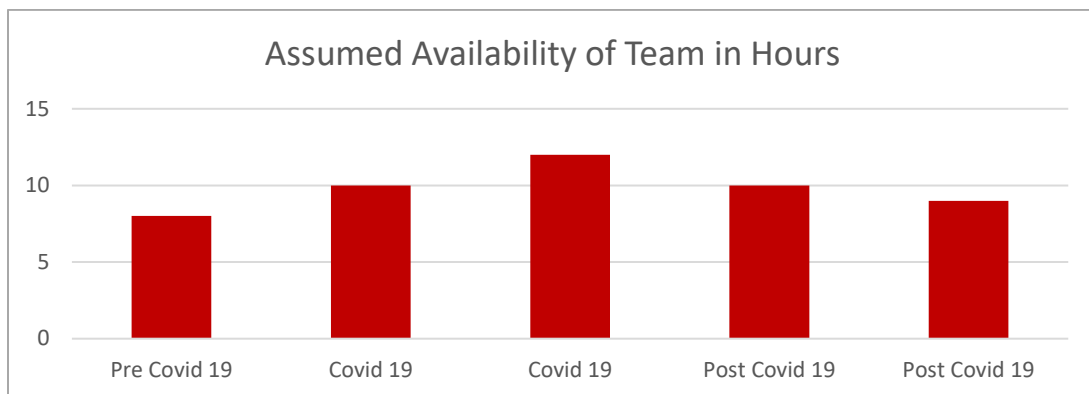
- **Manage Relationships:** A Project manager needs to build and maintain key relationships with customers, clients and stakeholders. Trust is an extremely critical factor for the success of any project. Since teams are now working remotely, trusting and building, relationship requires intentional effort as well as care and feeding.

- **Exploit communication channels:** Organizations today have multiple communication channels available to them, each serving a different need. Audio and Video conferencing software can be used for discussions and virtual team meetings. Collaboration tools like Instant Messengers can be used for quick one line urgent questions and informal discussions.
- **Build transparent work environment:** Maintaining transparency help build healthy work environment and drives employee satisfaction as well. Teams are increasingly requesting that the Project Managers should increase transparency in the workplace. The onus will be on Project Manager to set the example and lead from the front. The Project Manager should share the information openly with the team and encourage them to share their opinions, information and queries.
- **Embrace Asynchronous collaboration:** As the team members work remotely/ from home, work will begin to be done not in real-time transactions, but in asynchronous communications, through phone calls, documents, Instant Messages, and even through email. Interacting in an asynchronous manner may be of benefit allowing for different kind of communication allowing for uninterrupted working and delivering on complex outcomes.

- **TEAM AVAILABILITY, UTILIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

- **Utilization:** It is a general observation that the team members put in extra effort and hence log additional time during the disruptions. This could be due a learning curve as teams are getting used to new normal. We will use current Covid-19 as an example. So the team members are getting used to remote and distributed working.

- The graph below depicts assumed availability of team in pre and post Covid – 19 situations.



Considering the steep increase in the time spent during the Covid-19 phase, care should be taken on the well-being of the teams as they have the potential to Impact health and psychology of individual/s. It can also bring conflict as the thin line between work and personal life disappears.

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** In remote environments, team members may not have clear view of their daily tasks or access to the colleagues in case of impediments. Project Manager will need to ensure that all the team members know what is expected out of them in terms of deliverables and their due date. Along with this, the team should also know what the task dependency on each other's tasks is.
- **Trust & Comfort:** With remote teams, Project Managers needs to ensure that there is a level of trust amongst the team members. The easiest approach to achieve this is to have informal discussions with the team regularly. The team should be given comfort of time or quality buffer for their deliverables. As these are difficult times and no one is used to work from home for such longer periods.
- **Monitor Performance:** In remote environments, the Project Managers should establish clear performance metrics so that the team members know what the criteria for performance assessment is. The Project Manager should innovate KPIs like 'proactivity', 'fulfilment of promises', etc., along with the traditional KPIs for schedule, cost and time.
- **Schedule of Work:** Project managers need to guide teams in this new system towards success, while remembering that the same changes apply to them as well especially in terms of availability. Fix the daily schedule of work for the team. The Project managers should resist the urge to be available at all times of the day and night, simply because they can.

- **LEVERAGING REMOTE WORKING AND ENSURE DATA SECURITY**

Being unprecedented situation, project managers are facing a new set of challenges. The team is working from home and it is next to impossible to build a working relationship with between members. For team to work coherently together, new rules are to be set to enable the team to perform and complete the project. Some methods that can enable this for the team are

- **Time:** fewer and shorter meetings from home makes that much difference in keeping team interested in project.
- **Activity:** what is required for project and what has to be well defined? It was so earlier too, but now that there are few implications of not doing so is dangerous to a greater degree it becomes more important.

- **Expectation:** Teams expectation on projects are different and has to be brought to same page with continuous communications from project manager.
- **Security:** From data, perspective has to be at the highest level in the project as the project manager will not be aware of circumstances at everyone's home.
- **Well-being:** Team member's physical and mental well-being is gained significant traction in today's times.

About the Authors



Sumeet Paprikar

Sumeet is a professional with PMP, TOGAF and ITIL v3 Intermediate certifications. He has more than 16 years of work experience across Project Management, Service Delivery, Consulting, Product & Production Support disciplines in global projects. He has worked with customers in projects related to ERP, IT Infrastructure, Telecom OTT & VAS and Core Telecom. He can be contacted on sumeet.paprikar@techmahindra.com



Kaustubh Kumar

Kaustubh is an MBA with TOGAF and six sigma green belt certifications having 17+ years of experience in Business Transformation. He has worked with customers across globe in areas such as Program & Project Management, Organization Change Management and Business Process Re-engineering. His focus has been Financial Services and Hi-tech domains. He can be contacted on kaustubh.kumar@techmahindra.com



Mandar Athalye

Mandar is a PMP certified program manager with over 18 years of experience in managing complex multi-million-dollar transformation programs for clients with geographically distributed teams and stakeholders. He has vast experience working with global clients in areas of Technology Transformation, Project & Program Management and Product Development. He can be contacted on MA00642339@techmahindra.com

About Tech Mahindra

Tech Mahindra represents the connected world, offering innovative and customer-centric information technology experiences, enabling Enterprises, Associates and the Society to Rise™. We are a USD 5.2 billion company with 123,400+ professionals across 90 countries, helping 981 global customers including Fortune 500 companies. Our convergent, digital, design experiences, innovation platforms and reusable assets connect across a number of technologies to deliver tangible business value and experiences to our stakeholders. Tech Mahindra has been recognized amongst India's 50 best companies to work for in 2020 by the Great Place to Work® Institute.

We are part of the USD 21 billion Mahindra Group that employs more than 240,000 people in over 100 countries. The Group operates in the key industries that drive economic growth, enjoying a leadership position in tractors, utility vehicles, after-market, information technology and vacation ownership.

(*Figures as per Q1,2020)

About Tech Mahindra's Business Excellence Services

We are the Business Excellence team, Tech Mahindra's consulting unit. We help clients achieve business objectives in the digital era

- ❖ We work with clients to develop and implement digital transformation strategies that impact their products and business models
- ❖ We help our clients transform their operations and processes in line with this strategy
- ❖ We also help them build a key enabler for achieving these objectives: agility and automation in the technology function
- ❖ Our program and change management services ensure on-track implementation of the various transformation initiatives

Proven methodologies, frameworks and tools underpin all of these services. These are based on design thinking approaches that ensure stakeholder buy-in at each stage. Our clients find our global experience, collaborative approach, and the ownership we bring to ensure outcomes in every one of our engagements, as a key differentiator.

BE. Tech Mahindra Consulting
befutureready@techmahindra.com