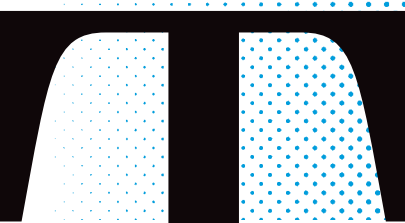# FIT & TRIM

A tailored approach
to staffing keeps
project teams in
tip-top shape.

**BY MATT ALDERTON
PORTRAIT BY JON ENOCH**

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o make the most of their project staff, organizations strive to stay in the Goldilocks zone. Teams need to be just right: not too big or small, not under- or over-qualified. The perfect mix is required to get the job done.

PMI's November 2014 report, *Talent Management: Powering Strategic Initiatives in the PMO*, shows that being particular about project staff produces powerful results. The survey discovered a clear link between talent management, corporate strategy and project success. It found, for example, that organizations waste a third fewer dollars on projects when they align talent management with corporate strategy. Furthermore, organizations with this talent alignment achieve an average project success rate of 72 percent, compared to 58 percent for organizations without it.

That doesn't surprise Diego Jaime Dedacek, PMP, project management office (PMO) manager at IT company Prominente S.A. in Córdoba, Argentina. "Project staffing is one of the most important matters to consider when trying to reduce the chances of project failure," he says. "This is especially sensitive in human-intensive industries, such as IT services and software development. If the professionals assigned to the project do not fit the project needs, you are very likely to increase risks that could adversely affect the project."

To build teams with the right bandwidth and expertise, organizations must customize their approach to project staffing. Here are five steps project leaders can take to fill talent gaps—and reduce redundancies—across the portfolio.

1 Know the Needs

Putting people in the right positions starts with a needs analysis, says Eliani Figueiro Ramos, PMI-RMP, PMP, senior portfolio, program and project manager at software company TOTVS S.A. in Joinville, Brazil.

"Each project is unique," she explains. "So we analyze project scope, time and budget to determine how many team members will be required to complete the project."

This type of up-front understanding also helps project managers strike a balance of skill sets that will drive success, Ms. Figueiro Ramos says.

"If the project has many simple activities, it is more efficient to have more team members with lower costs than highly qualified team members who are much more expensive," she says. "However, if the project is developing a new technology, for example, you will need specialized team members. In cases like this, one senior member works better than two or three [mid-level] team members."

To help him define the ideal team, Dan Turner, PMP, senior project manager, takes a top-down approach to needs assessment at Graymont, a supplier of lime and lime-based products based in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. He works with the project owner and functional managers to appoint the appropriate team leads, and those individuals outline the capacity required to deliver the desired results. Using these resource requirements, a group of project and functional leaders create an overarching staffing plan.

"We start out by looking at what our desired outcome is," Mr. Turner explains. "That's a key factor to determine how many people, and which skill sets, are needed for a project."

2 Fill the Gaps

If an initiative requires a skill set that can't be found among the "usual suspects," project managers should start shopping for talent across—or beyond—the organization, Mr. Turner says.

"If there's a project that's totally unique, we'll do a survey of our project management community within the organization and find out who might have relevant experience," he says.

It's also helpful to know who has the ability to adapt on the fly, says Richard Gower, PMP, project, program and portfolio management office senior manager at Mars Global Services—the shared services arm of food manufacturing company Mars Inc.—in Slough, England. Hiring project managers with experience across multiple functions makes it easier to fill skill gaps quickly, wherever and whenever they exist.

"Not only will they bring their fundamental project management skills, but they'll also pick up new functions pretty quickly," Mr. Gower says.

If the organization is adding a new skill set it will need to leverage again in the future, training and development—and perhaps even the creation of a new position—might be worth the investment. But jobs requiring short-term specialist functions or technical skills are best given to temporary team members, Mr. Gower says.

"If we're looking for specific functional and technical skills that we don't think we'll need long-term, we'll look for a consultant or contractor."

3 Run a Lean Team

Effective project staffing also means shedding redundant and unneeded resources when necessary, says Mr. Gower. His organization avoids carrying extra weight by capping the number of internal project managers based on current business volume.

"The level of demand for projects from our customers will go up and down, so we tend to augment project teams as needed with third-party project managers from various suppliers," he says.

To make sure everyone is working at his or her full capacity, Mr. Turner clearly defines team members' roles at the beginning of every new project. By outlining specific responsibilities, he avoids redundancy and minimizes the need for cuts in the future.

"It's really important that everybody understands their roles and responsibilities, and that those are well-defined at the beginning and well-communicated throughout the life cycle of the project," Mr. Turner says.

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4 Keep Risks on the Radar

It's always possible that talent needs will change during a project, requiring shifts in the team's size or skills profile. To avoid getting caught off guard, project managers should highlight staffing concerns on their risk registers, Mr. Turner says.

"You're going to run into situations where you're not going to have the right skill set when you need it. A new project manager might have little experience, a team might be unevenly dispersed across multiple sites, or somebody could be injured and end up off the project," he says.

Once they understand staffing risks, project managers should create mitigation plans to address them, Mr. Turner says. And they shouldn't despair. "If a project falls into high-risk territory due to resource availability, this doesn't mean it's doomed. It just means the project's leadership must plan and lead accordingly."

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5 See the Big Picture

Taking a holistic approach to staffing can help organizations find ways to optimize and consolidate project teams. Proactively analyzing teams across the portfolio can be especially effective in a global organization, like Mr. Gower's.

Mars Global Services "tends to be a quite decentralized organization, and there can be different practices across the portfolio," he says. This can obscure the supply and demand of resources across the organization. The project, program and portfolio management office aims to facilitate more consistent practices, and track new initiatives coming in the future.

"Only then will we be able to say with confidence how many project managers we need, with what skills and in what region," Mr. Gower says.

Taking a portfolio view also helps project leaders make sure their talent management practices are supporting the organizational strategy, Ms. Figueiro Ramos says.

"Sometimes it's difficult to put the right talent in the right position. If you have limited resources, you need to choose which project is more important," she says. "Aligning project talent with corporate strategy means allocating the best resources to prioritize projects." **PM**

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