

Accountability, Dependencies, and Commitments

“You manage your commitments; nobody manages them for you.”

Q_{9.1} How do I determine my domain of responsibility?

A_{9.1} Simply stated, your *domain of responsibility* includes all responsibilities and commitments that fall within the scope of your assignment. It includes any activities and actions necessary to support your meeting your commitments.

A person's domain of responsibility typically is far broader than first assumed. There is a simple but powerful saying that is made up of ten 2-letter words: *“If it is to be, it is up to me.”* This saying can help you define the boundaries of your domain as you work toward the successful achievement of your commitments.

**Domain of
responsibility**

Q_{9.2} If routine (typically weekly) project tracking meetings are held on a project, are they the mechanism for a project member to track the status of a dependency on another project member?

A_{9.2} The project tracking meeting is certainly an important and useful mechanism to help project members stay abreast of the progress of dependencies. However, do not use this meeting as the only method of tracking dependencies. A project member with a dependency on another project member should be in regular communication with that project member—especially as the dependency's due date

**Tracking
dependencies**

nears. Moreover, the project manager is expected to stay on top of the progress of activities/dependencies that are approaching completion.

**Informing
receiver of
status of
dependency**

Q_{9.3} If a project member (receiver) has a dependency on a deliverable from another project member (deliverer), what duty does the deliverer have to keep the receiver informed of the progress being made in preparing the deliverable?

A_{9.3} The deliverer (the person responsible for creating the deliverable) has the duty to inform the receiver (the person dependent on receiving the deliverable) if there is any likelihood that the deliverable will be late or incomplete. The deliverer should inform the receiver as soon as the deliverer sees a potential problem. Why? The sooner the receiver is aware of a potential problem, the sooner plans can be discussed to help ensure the complete deliverable is available on time or an alternative plan is set in motion.

Q_{9.4} Should the deliverer also inform the project manager of a possible problem, or is informing the receiver enough?

A_{9.4} The deliverer should definitely inform the PM. The PM must be aware of all problems and potential problems that could harm the project. His help may be needed to negotiate and resolve the problem. Moreover, the PM sees the bigger project picture and must also focus on downstream effects on other project members and on the overall project schedule plan.

**Maintaining
critical-path
schedule
for late
deliverable**

Q_{9.5} Say that a project member (deliverer) repeatedly says that he is on schedule to deliver a critical-path item to another project member (receiver) who has a dependency on that item—but the item is delivered three days late. Is the project member receiving the late delivery responsible

for maintaining the critical-path schedule, even though it wasn't his fault that the dependency was delivered late?

A_{9.5} Yes, the receiving project member is responsible for doing what is reasonable to maintain the critical-path schedule. Meanwhile, the project manager should be aware of the situation and, if necessary, should help ensure that the integrity of the project schedule plan is preserved.

Q_{9.6} But this isn't fair to the receiving project member. It wasn't his fault that the delivery was late. Why should he be held accountable for maintaining the overall schedule integrity?

A_{9.6} The first priority here is not placing blame. It is resolving the problem so that the overall project does not suffer. To that end, the PM should typically be informed of the situation and may be instrumental in working with all affected parties to repair the situation. Don't forget to inform and include downstream project members who also may be affected. The project member who originally caused the delivery to be late can also be included in the resolution.

Q_{9.7} What if a stakeholder does not give me information in a timely manner that I need to perform my job?

A_{9.7} As soon as you realize that there is a problem, the first thing to do is recover as best you can. Then discuss with the stakeholder the hardship you face because the information came to you late. Ask the stakeholder to keep you informed in a timely fashion next time. Make sure that you and the stakeholder understand the new process or mechanism to be followed. Also, make sure that your agreement is documented and the appropriate parties are informed of the agreement.

Q_{9.8} What if the stakeholder refuses to change or create a process to appropriately address my needs?

**Learning
information
late**

**Uncooperative
stakeholder**

A_{9.8} First work to resolve the problem with the stakeholder. Give her ample opportunity to help you. If it is clear that you are being ignored, and you cannot accept things the way they are, escalate the issue to the appropriate person. Do not overlook your own role in resolving the conflict—you personally might need to create or alter an existing process and champion that process to get the support you need.

Sharing information that is outside my domain of responsibility

Q_{9.9} I am not the project manager. What if I know that a project member will likely be late on a deliverable to another project member, but the receiving project member is not aware of the situation? The late deliverable will not affect me directly. Should I tell anyone?

A_{9.9} Usually, you are not technically responsible for informing affected parties. Why? Because doing so is outside your domain of responsibility. However, because there is a clear benefit to the overall project, you can see the upside in getting involved and contacting the appropriate stakeholders.

Q_{9.10} Who are the stakeholders that should be contacted?

A_{9.10} In most cases, you should first encourage the deliverer to inform the PM and other parties who would be affected by a late deliverable. If this doesn't work, then notify the PM. It will then be her duty to work with all affected parties to ensure the issue is appropriately handled.

Domain of responsibility defined by RM

Q_{9.11} Can you give an example of a case in which an unaffected project member clearly has the duty to inform other project members of potential problems?

A_{9.11} If the project member has been told by his boss that he is expected to go beyond his specific activities and tasks and to look out for the overall well-being of the project, then he has an expanded domain of responsibility. That project

member now has the duty to inform appropriate parties when he discovers a problem or potential problem outside his own core activities and tasks.

Q_{9.12} What if the project member has been told not by his boss, but by the project manager, to look out for the well-being of the project? Should the project member comply with the project manager's request?

Domain of responsibility defined by PM

A_{9.12} Yes. The PM is accountable for the overall project, which includes defining and enforcing the project culture and the behaviors expected from its members. The PM should also tell the project member's resource manager that she has placed this expectation on the project member so that the RM can work with his employee to support the PM.

Q_{9.13} Do you believe a project member's domain of responsibility should include looking out for the health of the overall project, not just his assigned activities and tasks?

Project member's domain of responsibility

A_{9.13} Yes, but this only works optimally if *all* project members are aware that they are expected to take on this expanded role. However, project members need to understand that they must not take their eyes off their primary focus: their own assigned activities and tasks.

Q_{9.14} What is the best way to ensure that all project members understand that they are responsible for looking out for the health of the overall project?

A_{9.14} Their bosses should let them know that their overall performance evaluations will be based in part on their concern and subsequent actions related to the overall health of the project. Also, a culture-training class (see Chapter 27, "Project Culture") given at the beginning of a project should reinforce this duty. Every project team member should understand that the project manager is the only

one who is fully accountable for the successful outcome of the project, but each member must also understand his role in successfully executing and completing the project.

Holding part-time stakeholders who have outside project conflicts accountable

Q_{9.15} I am a project manager. I have a project member who is assigned 50 percent of the time to my project and 50 percent to supporting applications that are active in production systems. Should I back off if this project member is going to deliver a critical-path item on my project late because he is being called upon to resolve a support problem requiring far more than 50 percent of his time?

A_{9.15} No. You should work to solve the problem. First talk with the part-time project member. If an acceptable solution cannot be reached, then the boss of the part-time project member must be included in the discussion. If the boss is not helpful, then the issue should be escalated until it is resolved.

The worst-case scenario for you? You are told to “live with it,” which means that your project may suffer. In this case, you must work as diligently as possible to mitigate any damage to the project—all the while keeping senior stakeholders informed of any possible harm to your project and asking for their help, if needed.

Missing commitments

Q_{9.16} Is it okay to miss a commitment?

A_{9.16} No, not in most cases. Commitments should be viewed as sacred. If project members do not respect commitments, their projects are at great risk of failure.

Q_{9.17} When is it okay to miss a commitment?

A_{9.17} Two situations in which missing a commitment is the right thing to do are (1) when someone with authority over your work duties resets your priorities, or (2) when business

needs dictate (the latter may or may not be related to the former).

Q_{9.18} As a project member, am I responsible for ensuring that all of my dependencies are sufficiently addressed in the project plan?

A_{9.18} Yes.

**Responsibility
for defining
dependencies
in project
plan**

Q_{9.19} But isn't that the job of the project manager?

A_{9.19} Not entirely. No one should be expected to understand your dependencies better than you. First and foremost, you must ensure that all of your dependencies are identified and satisfied in the project plan. The PM does have the duty to ask the right questions and help ensure that dependencies are properly planned, but you are accountable for communicating with others and insisting that your dependencies are appropriately addressed.

Q_{9.20} As a project member, what should I do if I believe that I cannot meet a committed date?

A_{9.20} Notify the project manager and those project members that may be affected. Work constructively with the PM and possibly your boss to obtain the help you need, and work with the PM and potentially affected project members to limit or repair any collateral damage.

**Unable
to meet a
committed
date**

Q_{9.21} Won't it make me look bad to ask for help?

A_{9.21} Every project member has the duty to make sure their activities and tasks are being performed and completed as expected and needed. Asking for help is a sign of professional maturity, not weakness. Not asking for help—and putting the project at risk—will really make you look “bad.”

Role of RMs in commitment of employees

Q_{9.22} What role do resource managers play with regard to the commitments their employees make?

A_{9.22} An important one. Resource managers should ensure that their employees are making reasonable, realistic commitments. It is common for employees to work on more than one project at a time, so it is even more essential for resource managers to make sure their employees are not spreading themselves too thin, causing projects to suffer.

Q_{9.23} Is it okay for employees to make significant commitments to projects without first informing their resource managers?

A_{9.23} Use caution here! The answer is entirely up to the resource manager. For example, employees assigned for the first time to a new job area, or weak or inconsistent performers, should consult their resource managers before making commitments. However, seasoned employees who reliably fulfill their commitments might be given wider latitude by their resource managers. If you are not sure what your boss would expect of you, then ask.

Specifying time of day of commitments

Q_{9.24} If I expect a delivery on a certain day or someone expects one of me, should I specify the time of day?

A_{9.24} Yes, if it matters—and it almost always does. When someone says she needs something from you next Tuesday, what does that mean to you? To some folks, it means that you can make the delivery by the end of the day on Tuesday. However, others think the end of the day on Tuesday is really 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday; that is, before the regular business day begins on Wednesday. But it is very possible that the requester meant that the deliverable was expected first thing Tuesday morning at 8:00 a.m. If specific delivery time is important, make sure both the deliverer and requester know what time delivery is expected.

Q_{9.25} What should I do if I am assigned to a project before I fully understand the magnitude of the commitment, and other duties prohibit me from fulfilling the expected commitment?

A_{9.25} Be truthful. Work with the PM in an attempt to negotiate an acceptable solution. If you are unable to resolve the issue, then include your resource manager in the discussion. Your boss likely has a far broader set of options that he might be able to suggest. Never stick your head in the sand and imply a commitment that you know you cannot fulfill.

**Discovering
overcommitment**

Q_{9.26} I am often included late in projects and consequently get boxed into overly ambitious dates. What can I do?

A_{9.26} Plenty! The first order of business is to be as creative as you can be to comply with the challenging due dates. Work with the PM, your boss, and any others that can help you resolve this problem.

On the off chance that there are no workable solutions, then you must not commit to unachievable dates. Go back to the PM and your boss and negotiate for a more reasonable set of dates. As stated earlier, never say “yes” to a request that you know you cannot fulfill; if you do, you become the problem.

But there is another important task to perform. You must change the process that excluded you from early participation in the project. Ensure that your department or group is on the proper lists for inclusion at key decision points for future projects.

**Invited late to
the project**

Q_{9.27} When it comes to commitments and accountability, should anyone on a project—for example, the vendor,

**Treating
all project
stakeholders
the same**

contractor, client, part-time employee, college intern, senior manager, or full-time company employee—be treated differently from anyone else on a project?

A_{9.27} No. All are needed to ensure the project is completed successfully. If any of these stakeholders are having difficulty meeting their commitments, you must work with them to ensure the issue is satisfactorily resolved.

List of reviewers and approvers

Q_{9.28} If I own a document or deliverable, am I responsible for compiling a complete list of reviewers and approvers?

A_{9.28} Yes, you should initiate the creation of a complete list, but the PM has the duty to ensure that no one has been overlooked. Better to err on the side of having too many people on the list than to overlook a key player.

Approver will not approve

Q_{9.29} What should I do if an approver of my deliverable will not approve it?

A_{9.29} Do your best to work with the approver to address his concerns. If that does not work, escalate the issue to the PM or the approver's boss—whichever is the preferred approach in your organization. Approvers are in a power position because you need their approval before you can move on. If you cannot obtain their approval, then you have the duty to initiate an escalation.

Reviewer will not approve

Q_{9.30} What if a reviewer of my deliverable does not approve it?

A_{9.30} Work with the reviewer to resolve his concerns. If that does not work, then you do nothing. Reviewers are *not* in a power position because you do *not* need their approval before you can move on. If the reviewer cannot live with the outcome of your discussion, then it is up to the reviewer to initiate an escalation of the issue to the PM or your boss—again, whichever is the preferred approach in your organization.

Q_{9.31} What should I do if someone requests work from me that seems urgent, but doing the work will cause me to miss existing commitments?

A_{9.31} If the requester has more authority than you do, you must comply with the request—but you have to inform the requester of any existing commitments that will suffer. You also must inform the PM and your boss (if different from the requester) that the focus of your work has been directed elsewhere. The PM or RM may escalate the situation so that you can refocus your attention on your original commitments. You also have the duty to inform project members who have a dependency on commitments you will miss.

New urgent work versus existing commitments

Q_{9.32} As a project manager, how do I obtain commitments from project members?

A_{9.32} Commitments can be viewed as big or small. Big commitments include project members agreeing to perform major activities on your project. You direct project members to define their portions of the project plan in terms of the activities and tasks to be performed. After the activities and tasks are defined and you approve them, they are considered commitments to be fulfilled by the project members.

Small commitments are day-to-day tasks that project members commit to perform and that may or may not appear in a project plan or require documentation (such as an e-mail or meeting minutes), depending on how important they are and on the reliability of the performer. These commitments are made on the spot; those involved are well aware of their promise to perform. You are responsible for deciding if a small commitment should be documented.

Obtaining commitments from project members

**Project
members
undermining
PM and team
decisions**

Q_{9.33} As a project manager, I conduct many meetings over the course of a project. Unfortunately, it is common for attendees to barely participate in discussing and resolving problems. Afterwards, I hear that some of the attendees are undermining decisions from the meeting—decisions that they were not willing to comment on during the meeting. What can I do?

A_{9.33} This situation highlights a gross example of those project members' professional immaturity. This dishonest and unaccountable behavior should not be tolerated. It doesn't just undermine your meeting and your good leadership intentions; it undermines the project's and team's business objectives.

I suggest you confront these project members individually, in a professional manner, and ask for their personal help in future meetings. Let them know that their behavior undermines the project and that you need their contributions to make the project as successful as possible. Tell them that you know they can bring value to these meetings. When conducting future meetings, praise them for their participation and the ideas they contribute. If they remain passive and will not participate, ask them directly for their advice and counsel on the topics being discussed.

If a project member continues this highly unprofessional behavior, include his boss in addressing the situation. Repeated offenses could be grounds for dismissal.

When new projects are started, discuss this issue in culture-training classes so that everyone knows what behaviors are expected of them. (See Chapter 27, "Project Culture.") Remember that your handling of these situations will be watched closely by all members of your project team.