Allied Forces

Project analysts can help project managers become more effective leaders.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Being a consistently successful leader includes creating methods to improve primary business parameters, such as boosting productivity, reducing costs and increasing client satisfaction. In that search for effectiveness, project managers can find a powerful ally in a project analyst.

In some organizations, the role of the project analyst, or some portion thereof, might be performed by a project administrator, a project scheduler, project coordinator or project associate. Whatever they're called, project analysts can play a significant role in helping the project manager—and, therefore, projects—be more successful.

Project managers should focus their energies on leading projects to successful conclusions. Support jobs consume far too much of project managers' time and energy and can be done by project analysts.

Let's look at the more significant duties of the project analyst:

■ **Serve as the primary interface to project management tools.** It's highly unproductive for most project managers to spend time personally entering and modifying data in project management tools. A project analyst likely can work with these tools better, faster and at far less cost. The project analyst also can generate specific reports from project management tools that can help track and manage the progress of the project plan.

■ **Assist project members preparing their plans.** The project analyst can ensure that team members receive proper training in how to develop effective plans for their portions of the project.

■ **Collect member plans to create a project plan and analyze progress.** Under the direction of the project manager, the project analyst collects the plans from the team members or leaders and enters or loads the material into the chosen project management tools. The project analyst may regularly review the progress being made on some or all of the individual plans. He or she can help ensure approved plans are being implemented and any problems are addressed.

■ **Provide support in project tracking meetings.** Recording the meeting minutes, creating "action items" as they are raised and actively participating in discussion as appropriate, the project analyst is an integral part of the team and knows the project's exact status. The project analyst also can help prepare routine reports to senior management and the clients.

■ **Back up the project manager.** If the project analyst has achieved a certain level of skills and experience in project management, then he or she might perform back-up duties when the project manager is not available—if not in a decision-making capacity then at least in a data-gathering capacity.

■ **Make the project manager look good.** The project analyst's function is to help the project manager be successful so the project will be successful.
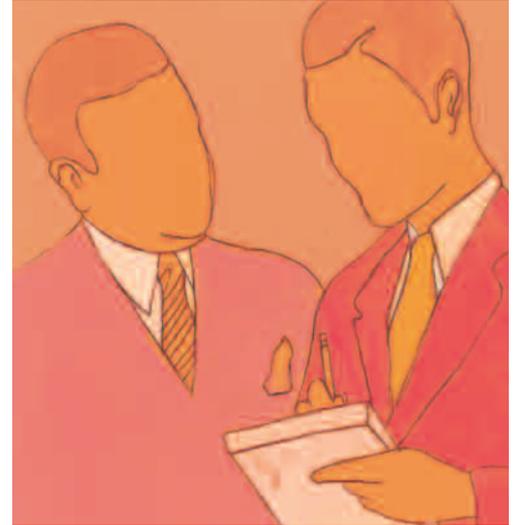
The ratio of project analysts to projects and project managers varies depending on the complexity and size of the projects and the skills of the project manager. One project analyst may be able to support a handful of small projects of five to 15 core members each or support one high-maintenance mid-size project with 50 to 75 core members. Large projects may benefit from multiple project analysts.

Leadership involves creating a productive work environment. By adopting project analysts, organizations can free up project managers to take on more projects and perform more effectively. **PM**

Neal Whitten, PMP, president of The Neal Whitten Group, is a speaker, trainer, consultant, mentor and author. His latest book is Neal Whitten's No-Nonsense Advice for Successful Projects.