

This material is reprinted from PM Network magazine (November 2006) with permission from the Project Management Institute (PMI) Headquarters, Four Campus Boulevard, Newtown Square, PA 19073-2399 USA. Phone: (610) 356-4600. For more information about PMI visit www.pmi.org. "PMI" and "PM Network" are trademarks of the Project Management Institute, Inc. (c)2007 Project Management Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.

Sole Control

Sharing power almost always harms people, projects and outcomes.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Even though sharing power goes against human nature, it's a common practice on projects and across organizations. Project members are often assigned to co-own activities and tasks, and projects often have more than one project manager. It rarely works well. When two or more people must work together, one should be designated as the leader. The leader is the person who feels the greatest level of accountability and is considered the primary interface to the team.

So-called leaders who assign people to share power risk jeopardizing outcomes. These "leaders" are either inexperienced, too soft to make tough decisions or are incompetent.

There are at least eight reasons that sharing power should be avoided:

- 1. Lack of accountability.** No individual has a personal stake in the big picture. Instead, each person predominately focuses on his or her own tasks with diminished interest in the other person's progress.
- 2. Reduced personal commitment.** The passion that a person can bring to the job is considerably weakened by sharing an assignment with another.
- 3. Emergence of a no-man's land.** Each person sharing power has a designated domain of responsibility, but that arrangement leaves a gray area, for which neither party feels full responsibility.

4. Confusion over accountability.

When a problem or issue arises, it's not always clear who to take it to and who will own it.

5. Lack of a final arbiter. No person has the power to decide a dispute, which can cause issues to drift and emotions to fester.

6. Conflicting personalities and work habits. The styles of each person will differ in discipline, efficiency, follow-through, people skills, dedication, politics and a whole lot more.

7. Personal animosity. When two people share power, one person will inevitably expend more effort than the other—or at least embrace that perception. For many, this can cause resentment and bitterness.

8. Recognition challenges. It's difficult to single out one person over the other for special recognition when both were assigned the work needed to achieve the outcome.

A Variation on the Theme

Let's look at a popular variation of sharing power: job-sharing, when two people work on the same task with the same responsibilities but at different times. Often this arrangement leaves both people equally accountable but they're also both ultimately accountable.

Job-sharing is fraught with the same eight downsides, but my experience



suggests this form of job-sharing may have a bit more success. For one thing, each person typically has a defined scope of responsibility, yet feels accountable for the whole when on active duty. In addition, people are motivated to make the situation work because they are grateful that the organization is willing to accommodate their schedule.

By making one person accountable—in charge and driving the endeavor—we are more in control over our destiny and far more motivated to excel. Focused responsibility and accountability bring the best out in each of us. **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.

