

THE PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR **A NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGM**

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Introduction

- > Do your PM's have years of experience using PM tools to plan and control projects?
- > Do your project managers all use different PM tools?
- > Do your project managers all use PM tools differently?
- > Do they coordinate resources shared with other PM's?
- > Do they coordinate inter-project dependencies with other PM's?
- > Do they report when you want them to?
- > Do their reports help to run the business?
- > Is a staff assistant needed to compile, summarize, and interpret their reports?

This paper is intended to introduce the benefits of the project administrator for environments that are new to project management disciplines, or for whom project management is not their primary function.

Project management has been used to coordinate large numbers of people performing many interdependent activities since the pyramids. Modern "project mature" organizations include engineering and construction companies, defense contractors, and government agencies that employ those companies. In recent years non-project organizations that instead perform repetitive activities like making or distributing products or providing services (ie. the majority of the corporate and public sector world) have found themselves forced to re-engineer products and operations at an ever increasing rate to be competitive. This increasing change has translated into an increase in the size and number of projects non-project organizations must manage, thus the dramatic increase in demand for project management capabilities and interest in conferences such this one.

Non-project repetitive activity organizations employ functional departments rather than project teams for their normal daily operations. Their new dual, functional/project, environment causes them to encounter obstacles not seen by pure project organizations:

- Their department structure and personnel are better suited to repetitive operations than one-of-a-kind tasks characteristic of a project.
- Project managers and teams are selected when needed from operating departments rather than from a pool of full time professionals.

- Project team members also have responsibilities to their department and often carry on both activities simultaneously.
- Executive management has dual responsibility, to both the project and their function.
- The financial system is time period rather than project duration oriented leading to budget difficulties.
- The project manager has difficulty ensuring that functional managers will honor their commitments to supply manpower to the project on the dates in the plan.

With multiple large projects taking place in a functional organization management finds it difficult to obtain consistent planning and reporting from its project managers and to understand and control the dual environment.

An increasing number of functional organizations have determined that the most effective way to manage projects in this environment is through a **project administrator**. An experienced project administrator provides structure and computer tools that support project planning, resource scheduling, progress tracking, and status reporting turning new project managers into professionals.

Operating as the primary interface between the project executive and multiple project managers an experienced project administrator:

- Supports both project managers and project executives in the dual environment.
- Absorbs the project planning and reporting burden of multiple project managers providing each with 20% to 50% more time for direct project management activities.
- Improves the quality and consistency of planning and reporting.
- Ensures the resolution of cross project issues such as resource conflicts and plan inter-dependencies.
- Reduces training and software costs, and the overall cost of project management
- Can lead management in controlling their projects and drive the entire project environment.

- May be used to bring state of the art project control to any environment that does not have strong project management skills without the need for intensive project managers' training.

A project administrator supporting the project manager in these critical activities can play a pivotal role in large and multi-project environments. The result is a new leadership paradigm with a project administrator as the focal point for project information complimenting the role of the project manager as the driving force of project execution.

This paper describes the justification for the project administrator, the roles that the project administrator can play as a function of project environment and management style, outlines the steps in the project administration process, and describes the qualifications of the project administrator.

PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

Project administration is the administrative framework that supports project control; planning, resource scheduling, progress tracking, and status reporting. Of the eight management disciplines identified by the Project Management Institute¹ as responsibilities of the project manager,

1. SCOPE
2. TIME (P&R)
3. COST (P&R)
4. RISK
5. QUALITY
6. HUMAN RESOURCES (P&R)
7. COMMUNICATION (P&R)
8. CONTRACTS & PROCUREMENT

P&R = Administrative components of Planning and Reporting.

planning and reporting (P&R) are components of four of them.

Advances in project management computer tools and techniques have added a considerable project administration knowledge burden and work load to the project manager who traditionally performs this function. To properly satisfy the planning and reporting requirements of management and of the project's participants, the project manager needs to allocate from 20% to 50% of his/her time to project administration, represented by the dotted PA area in Figure 1 .

Of the qualities sought in a project manager,

- Leadership.
- A Motivator.
- People manager.
- Political.
- A good communicator.

- Understands finance.
- Technical expertise.
- Good organizational skills.
- A synthesizer, problem solver.
- Able to handle many activities at the same time.
- Good planner.
- Good reporter.

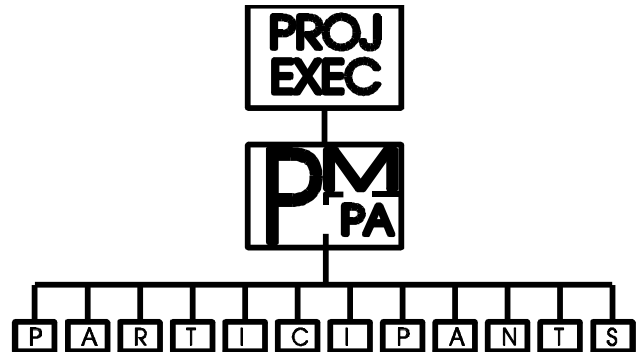


Figure 1

Leadership is usually at the top of the list and reporting close to the bottom. Project managers need to be leaders, good with people, understand the technology, politics and finance, and get things done. They often have difficulty satisfying their organization's planning and reporting requirements because higher urgency activities keep them too busy, and they have their own more expedient ways of planning and reporting that satisfy their needs and take less time.

Successful highly sought after project managers sometimes ignore the organization's planning and reporting standards because they are too busy, and management cannot afford to alienate them. Their success immunizes them from what they consider to be bureaucracy.

PROJECT ADMINISTRATION IMPLEMENTATION

THE SUBORDINATE PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR

For large projects the project manager may assign a team member or subordinate the project management tool manipulation responsibilities. See Figure 2.

The project administrator uses a project management tool to document the project's plans, track progress, and provide the reports needed to support the project. The PA does not relieve the PM of the planning and reporting responsibility, only of the tool manipulation and administrative reporting burden.

A project manager teamed with a project administrator will have more time available for direct project management activities. However, the subordinate arrangement

can result in "flavored" reporting. Pressures on the project manager influence the project administrator to skew reporting to hide negative or enhance positive information to improve the appearance of the project. Thus management cannot always rely on the information it receives and participants may miss information critical to keeping the project on schedule.

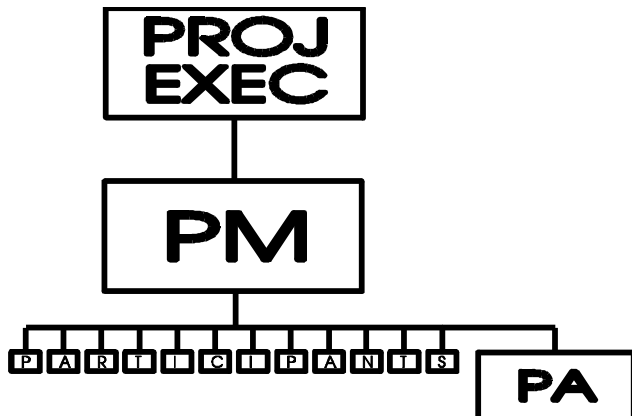


Figure 2

THE DEDICATED PEER LEVEL PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR

The peer level implementation (Figure 3) is recommended over the subordinate (Figure 2) because working for the project executive instead of the project manager affords the project administrator the independence needed to be totally honest in his/her reporting. It also provides a larger skills pool, the project executive's entire organization, from which to select the most suitable candidate for project administrator.

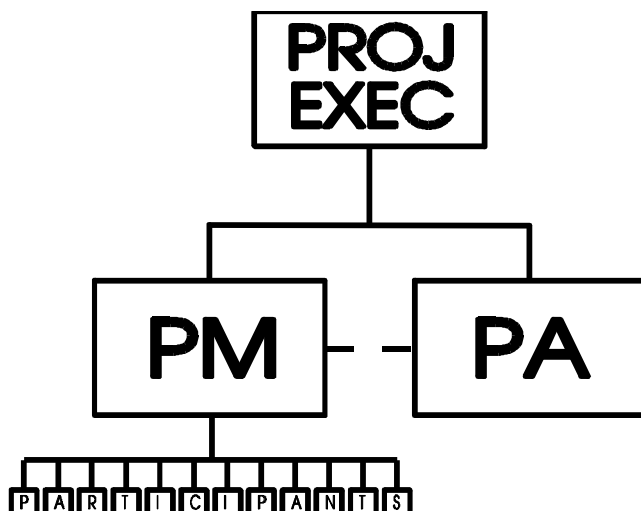


Figure 3

Project managers may object to the loss of direct reporting authority over the project administrator because he/she cannot be assured that the PA will be available when needed and the PA will not be dedicated only to the success of their project. The project manager's concern highlights the need for management to ensure the PA's availability and dedication for project administration to work.

In a multi-project environment with many small projects a peer level project administrator dedicated to a single project cannot be justified as a full time job. The PA will therefore perform other duties as well reducing their availability and dedication to project administration activities and diluting their tools skills with other skills requirements.

THE SHARED PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR

A peer level project administrator shared by multiple projects could be dedicated full time to project administration activities as shown in Figure 4.

The Shared Project Administrator

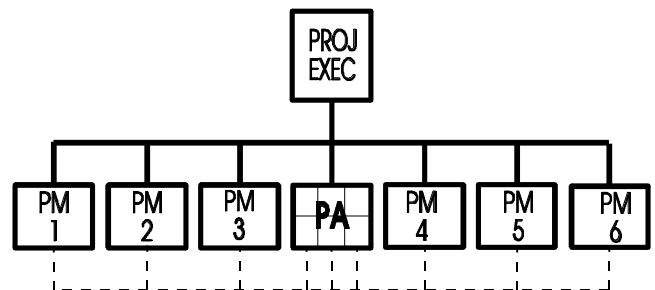


Figure 4

The shared project administrator implementation builds upon the advantages of the part time subordinate and peer level PA:

1. Better skills because the PA is dedicated full time to project administration activities.
2. Better skills because the PA is chosen from a much larger pool of candidates.
3. Independence of reporting.
4. Consistent planning and reporting because the PA will implement the organization's standards for all projects.
5. Better resolution of cross project plan interdependencies because the PA is in a position to see how plans relate to one another.
6. Better cross project resource balancing and utilization because the PA can see how people are being allocated across all plans.

7. Reduced personnel costs. For example, if 10 PM's are spending 20% of their time on PA work they do 8 PM's worth of direct PM activity (10 X 80%) and 2 PA's worth of PA activity (10 X 20%). If one PM becomes a shared PA for them the remaining 9 PM's can now do 9 PM's worth of direct PM activity (9 X 100%). The shared PA would do 2 part time PA's of work because the dedicated full time PA is more efficient than each PM doing PA part time. This is a net gain in productivity of 1 PM with no additional headcount.
8. Reduced training costs. Only the PA requires tool training and training in the planning and reporting standards of the organization.
9. Reduced software costs. Only one project management tool license required per PA instead of one per project.
10. Project managers' involvement with administrative details is significantly reduced.

One full time shared project administrator should be able to support the activities of up to 150 active project participants distributed among multiple projects. For example, the shared project administrator should be able to support up to 25 six person project teams.

MANAGEMENT POLICY

It is management policy to control inventory, expenses, and headcount. Like other controls, project administration (planning, scheduling, tracking, and reporting) is good business practice and must be management policy, not an employee option.

Most project managers embrace shared project administration, using its convenient access to the project management tool to produce detailed plans and reports as a means of communicating to their management and the team the complexity of the work.

Some project managers object to shared project administration because they prefer to control the dissemination of information about their project. Project Executives must consider the success record of such a project manager. Imposing the high visibility component of project administration on a previously successful project manager against his/her will may prove costly. One can achieve many of the benefits of shared project administration while allowing the project manager to retain control over information dissemination.

THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR VARIES WITH ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT STYLE

THE PROJECT ENVIRONMENT

The project administrator can enhance the effectiveness of project management in a variety of environments and implementation variables:

- Corporate
 - Single large project
 - Multiple projects with or without interdependencies
 - Matrix management or traditional structure
 - With or without outside contractors
 - Contractors have their own project managers
 - Contractors supply only workers
- Government
 - Run by government agency
 - Run by contractors
 - Mixed
 - Same variables as Corporate environment
- International
 - Foreign and/or international agencies
 - Same variables as Corporate and Government

Issues specific to the implementation of project administration in each of these environment/variable combinations is beyond the scope of this paper and will be addressed at a later time.

THE PROJECT EXECUTIVE'S (PE's) MANAGEMENT STYLE

1. **PE's MANAGEMENT STYLE - Hands On:** Very involved, demands weekly status meetings, detailed reports, asks frequent tough questions, and requires accountability for every slippage.

PA's ROLE - Double Agent: In this role the PA is the agent of both management and the project managers. The PM receives planning and reporting support which reduces their administrative workload, while management receives the reports they require at the frequency specified and uses the information to clear obstacles and hold the PM's to their commitments.

2. **PE's MANAGEMENT STYLE - Hands Off:** Occasionally (monthly or quarterly) asks to see a status report or hold a status meeting, doesn't ask difficult probing questions or require strict accountability, doesn't read the PA's reports.

PA's ROLE - PM's Agent: In this role the PA is the agent of the project managers. The PM receives planning and reporting support which reduces their administrative workload, while management receives only the reports the PM's choose to provide.

3. **PE's MANAGEMENT STYLE - Management wants better control:** Management not experienced in this environment and needs guidance.

PA's ROLE - Leadership: By providing frequent (weekly) brief revealing reports the PA can enable management to ask the right people the right questions. If management simply telephones those showing lateness in the reports the PA can leverage management's influence to achieve project control. Here the PA plays a leadership role enabling management to control their projects even if they don't have time to be involved.

In role number 1 management controls the projects through the project administrator. In role number 2 project managers control their projects using the support of the project administrator. In role number 3 the project administrator controls the projects by leveraging the influence of the project executive to maintain committed schedules.

In all environments and management styles the project administrator/project manager team is more effective than the project manager was alone.

EXAMPLE

Shared project administration was used at IBM to manage the project to prepare five new headquarters office buildings in Somers, N.Y. for a raised floor computer installation and its associated communications and remote computing facilities, and to move 18 mainframe computers and 2300 executives and their staffs into the new buildings.²

A single project administrator supported 26 project teams with 150 participants completing 30 person-years of work over a 14 month period. The usual startup delays while an organization decides what project management tool to use and how to report were avoided. Planning began immediately. As a result of weekly high visibility reporting project managers and management were able to respond quickly to delays against original commitments. As a result all 50 project milestones were completed on their original plan dates without one schedule slip.

Shared project administration was significantly less work for the Somers project managers. It eliminated the need for them to learn a project management tool and to provide reports to management. Planning was done during one or more interviews with the project administrator and status reporting consisted of one representative from each team returning a document once a week updating the status of those tasks that were active that week. The project administrator did the rest.

The Somers project is an example of a corporate, multiple projects with interdependencies, traditional management structure environment; with management wanting better control, management style number 3.

THE PROJECT ADMINISTRATION PROCESS

Project administration is an eight step process.

Step 1 - Identify Projects and Teams

The project administrator identifies which projects are candidates for the project administration process and the project manager and key planners for each project.

Step 2 - Plan Building Interviews

The PA schedules planning interviews with each project manager and/or their planner representatives. This interview takes place in front of a personal computer with the project management tool being used to record the plan as described by the interviewees. The PA is skilled in asking questions that will ensure that the plan is complete, identifying all tasks (duration and work effort), participants, dependencies, and milestones. The result is the plan the PM says he/she will execute.

Step 3 - Interplan Reconciliation

The PA keeps track of interplan deliverables and schedules the plans with respect to one another to account for these dependency relationships. The PA also balances the use of resources across plans to ensure that no one is over committed, negotiating reallocations with the project managers if necessary.

Step 4 - Reconciliation with Management's Objectives

The PA reconciles the resulting detailed project plans with management's objectives. Where management's plans appear too ambitious the two sides are brought together to rework the schedule until it meets management's objectives without overloading the participants.

Step 5 - The Progress Report Form

The PA designs a turnaround document that can be used by each project team to feed back weekly progress information about the active tasks. All must agree on the schedule and method for communicating this information (E-mail, fax, phone call, messenger).

Step 6 - The Kickoff

Before the start of plan execution and tracking an orientation meeting should be held where the PA, introduced by the project executive, explains the project administration execution cycle and what project managers and participants should expect.

Step 7 - The Execution Cycle

Each week immediately after the Reporting Cycle Cutoff, say Sunday midnight (see Figure 5), the progress report forms representing work completed the previous week are collected. In the Figure 5 example the PA would spend

part of Monday collecting the information. Between Monday and Tuesday the PA, operating along the "Project Administration" arc of the Figure 5 cycle, uses the progress report information to update the project management tool plan and produce both numeric and verbal status reports. Verbal status reports assess the significance of the numbers on the numeric reports. This activity takes place while the project team continues to execute the plan. The reports are distributed Tuesday and the project teams adjust their activities to keep their projects on schedule.

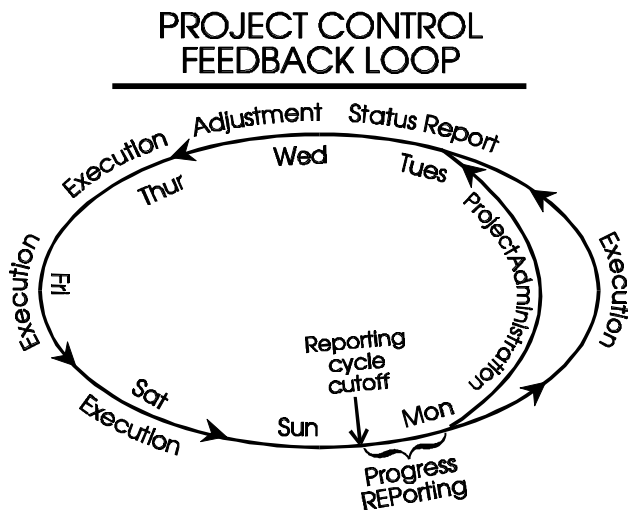


Figure 5

Step 8 - Shutdown and Postmortem

The PA may shut down the tracking and reporting process when project activity falls below a threshold intensity. For example, all major milestones on a project may have been completed and two cleanup tasks are due over the next three months. The project is still active but the project administration process overhead cannot be justified for such a low level of activity. Once the process is stopped the PA may provide a statistical summary of what was accomplished and a postmortem commentary.

PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR QUALIFICATIONS

The project administrator's skills should compliment those of the project manager as illustrated in Figure 6.

Where PM's lean towards the "do" end of the scale, PA's should be more "think" oriented, and thus better suited to the planning and reporting aspects of project management. The candidate should have:

- An aptitude for organization and a reputation for attention to detail.
- The ability to communicate effectively with all levels of the organization from upper management to the project participants.

- PC literacy.

Project administrators should either take a Project Administrator Training course like the one described in Appendix A or have equivalent work experience as outlined in the Project Administrator Job Description in Appendix B.

Selection of the individual depends upon the management style of the Project Executive and the organization. With hands on management where management is using the PA to control the projects or hands off management where the project manager controls the activities of the PA, the PA may be new to project management and junior in level because less self direction will be required.

Where management wants better control the PA must demonstrate leadership and initiative. This requires a more senior level individual with project management experience and the respect of management and his/her peers.

CONCLUSION

SAVINGS

Savings associated with shared project administration are the result of both specialization and consolidation.

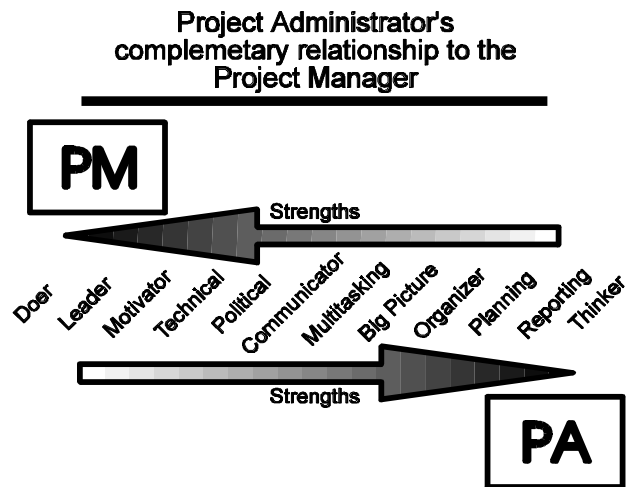


Figure 6

Specialization

The project administrator is chosen for his/her organizational skills and attention to detail, while project managers are selected for their ability to motivate people and get the job done. A dedicated shared project administrator exercises the tools and techniques full time thus bringing greater tool, planning, and reporting skills to each project than might otherwise be available, while the project manager that does not use a project administrator, only performs project administration tasks a small percentage of the time.

Consolidation

Consolidating project administration into a single individual provides uniform planning and reporting across all projects without the need to train each project manager and keep them current in the organization's standards. The project administrator ensures that cross-project dependencies, resource requirements, and other cross-project issues are reconciled, and provides upper management with a single focal point for information and control. And finally, there is no need to train every project manager in the use of a project management tool and have a software license for each one.

A NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

Shared project administration creates a new leadership paradigm with the project administrator as the focal point for project information complimenting the role of the

project manager as the driving force of project execution. Together they are an unbeatable team.

Regardless of the project environment the project administrator enhances the efficiency of both project managers and their management, saves money, and is a practical solution to the difficulties that organizations have harnessing the best in their project managers while maintaining their high planning and reporting standards.

REFERENCES

1. "Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) of the Project Management Institute," PMI PMBOK Standards Committee, March 28, 1987.
2. "Project Administration Methodology: Achieving Schedule Control on a Large Project - The Somers Project," P^mNETwork Magazine, July 1991, pp 9-33.

APPENDIX A

COURSE TITLE: PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING

Duration: Three days.

At the client's request duration may be extended to use live projects to initiate project administration implementation.

The Project Administrator relieves project managers of the administrative burden (but not the responsibility) associated with using a project management tool to manage their projects. The project administrator's planning and reporting service allows the project manager 20% to 50% more time for direct project management activities. A trained project administrator, using their tool skills full time, becomes extremely proficient and can support the project planning and reporting activity of up to 150 active project participants either distributed among multiple projects or all working on the same project.

In a multi-project environment the project administrator

1. Ensures that project planning and reporting formats are consistent across all projects and meet the organization's standards,
2. Ensures that cross project dependencies, resource requirements, and other issues are reconciled.
3. Becomes the focal point for information about all projects for upper management.

This course trains the Project Administrator to use a project management tool to help project managers

- a. Build their project plans,
- b. Schedule resources,
- c. Collect progress information during project execution, and
- d. Produce reports that will provide the project managers, project participants, and upper management the ability to see what needs to be done to keep projects on schedule.

Students will learn the generic tool features required to perform project administration using a state-of-the-art PC-based project management tool in their exercises. Primary focus is on the techniques of project administration, not the project management tool. These skills may easily be transferred to the client's tool of choice at a later time.

Upon completion of the course the student will be able to

- Identify projects that are candidates for project administration,
- Conduct structured plan-building interviews of the project manager and key project participants ensuring that all the necessary tasks, resources, dependency relationships, and milestones are defined, and produce a

workable project plan that all participants agree to as their own,

- Reconcile cross-plan dependency relationships,
- Balance resources among multiple project plans,
- Reconcile the project manager(s) detailed plans with management's objectives,
- Develop a progress gathering process appropriate for the project environment,
- Develop appropriate metrics and produce project status reports that will enable and encourage project managers, participants, and management to maintain their committed schedules.

Students will receive materials during the course which will become their Project Administrator's Guide and Reference Manual upon course completion.

Course topics include:

Introduction

- Project organization structures/sources of power
- Organization cultures
- Project classifications
- How project administration works - An example

Project Management Tool Orientation

- Project management tool appreciation
- Project management tool orientation
- Plan-building interview preparation exercises

The Eight Steps of Project Administration

- Identifying projects and teams
- The plan-building interview
- Interplan reconciliation
- Reconciling the project plan with management's objectives
- Progress data gathering
- The kickoff meeting
- The plan execution cycle
 - Project management tool reports
 - Other reports that get attention
 - Verbal reports that assess the metrics
 - Other execution cycle activities
- Shutdown and postmortem

Implementation

- Project management tool features required to support project administration
- Getting started

Student Prerequisites

The student should have

- An aptitude for organization and a reputation for attention to detail.
- The ability to communicate effectively with all levels of the organization from upper management to the project participants.
- PC literacy.

No prior project management education is required. Project participation and/or management experience is helpful but not essential.

APPENDIX B

JOB DESCRIPTION

TITLE: PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR

SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- Employs state-of-the-art project management tools and techniques to provide planning, scheduling, tracking, and reporting administrative services for project managers.
- Ensures the integrity of cross-project dependency relationships and resource utilization.
- Provides managers and executives with a focal point for information which may be used to control the organization's projects, resources, and priorities.

QUALIFICATIONS: The candidate should possess the combination of skills indicated by either column A or B.

A	B	DESCRIPTION
X		Previous successful project administration experience, or sufficient exposure to the PA function.
X		Experience with project administration tools and techniques used to build and manage project plans.
	X	Successful completion of "Project Administrator Training."
X	X	Ability to communicate effectively with project managers, participants, and executives at all levels of the organization.
X	X	Reputation for organization skills and meticulous attention to detail.
X	X	Familiarity with the technology of the work the project is doing.

MAJOR DUTIES

Plan Building:

- Using state-of-the-art project management tools and techniques work with the project managers, planners, and participants to develop their project plans.
- Reconcile cross project task and resource dependencies.
- Reconcile project team plans with executive objectives.

Tracking:

- Implement a mechanism to gather information about the progress of the project teams on the active tasks in their plans.

Reporting:

- Implement a reporting mechanism that keeps project executives, project managers, and project participants informed of the status of project activities, enables and motivates them to stay on schedule, and provides executives with sufficient information to control their organization's projects.

ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Peer level relationships with project managers is preferred over a subordinate relationship.
- Working relationships with all levels of management and project participants.
- Supervises apprentice project administrators.
- May have secretarial support staff.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INDICATORS

- Executives are comfortable with the level of detail and frequency of status reporting and are able to use the information.
- Executives are able to make informed decisions about their projects.
- There are no project administration related surprises during project execution.
- Executives and project managers are able to exercise schedule and budget control.
- Project managers prefer the services of the project administrator rather than their own project management tool.