



DR02: Dealing with “Gatekeeper” Project Managers

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Project management (PM) is the world’s fastest-growing profession, and arguably the youngest in the design & construction world. Contrary to the opinion of some architects I know, its providers are not similar to those of the world’s oldest profession. Perhaps because it is a young and evolving profession, the level of professionalism one encounters varies greatly.

At the top end of the scale, practitioners bring great benefits to projects: they understand thoroughly and respect the perspectives and needs of the consultant team as well as other project stakeholders, they bring superb management skills, and they add value at every step of the process.

At the other end of the scale are the practitioners who appear to have emerged from under rocks, who win work by promising to carve their fees from the consultants’ fees, who have little understanding of that which they purport to manage, who do not add value, and who appear to see themselves as mule-train drivers whose main tool is a coiled whip. We’ve all encountered these pseudo-PMs.

Most independent project managers in the design and construction industry are somewhere in between these extremes. Certainly the Project Management Institute (PMI) is working globally to increase the professionalism of project managers.

The “Gatekeeper” PM

One of the most annoying practices that some project managers of the second variety follow is to set themselves up as “gatekeepers” – controlling access to the client, and insisting that all communication with all team members goes through them. While they see themselves as providing some kind of essential “communications hub”, in fact they actually slow down (and sometimes disrupt) good communication. The practice increases the risk of everybody in the project team, except for themselves.

The “Postbox” PM

Often the syndrome described above is accompanied by the “Postbox” method of “managing” document flow. In this scenario, the PM never checks or coordinates anything – he simply forwards them on to those he thinks should receive them.

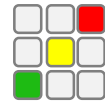
The “I’ll take care of it” PM

The above approach often goes hand-in-hand with a third syndrome – the “I’ll take care of it” promise that is never kept. These PMs use this line to cut down the fees of other consultants, but rarely follow through.

The result? Frustration all around, delayed progress, gaps and overlaps, and the PM blames everybody else.

Is there a solution?

There is one strategy you can use, that - while not getting rid of a useless PM- will help greatly to force them to either do their job or delegate it to people who will.



I developed this tool originally for Denton Corker Marshall in 1986, specifically in response to the triple syndrome described above. Then a paper-based system called “Task Manager”, it has been through several iterations since, and is now an integral part of the **iProjects Design Management** suite: **TeamWork**.

TeamWork identifies key coordination tasks for 28 design disciplines (including the PM). With **TeamWork** you swiftly create project-specific checklists for key tasks, for every discipline of the project team. You can move **TeamWork** tasks from one discipline to another with a single mouse click.

TeamWork gives you very low-overhead management of discipline interfaces, supporting the ability to offer cost-effective, detail-oriented project management services. Most importantly, it identifies the tasks a PM needs to do, and helps you to ensure that somebody is assigned those tasks. It works.

Below is a sample Task List.

Details		Map	Email	Communications	DDNA	Project Team	TeamWork	Notes	To Do
Consultants		Tasks							
ID	Check	Title	ID	Check	Assign to	Cons Title			
			NOTE: Do not re-assign Core Services items. Refer UserGuide 3.7 T						
AC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Acoustics Consultant	ID01	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare time and resources schedule for all interior design work.			
AR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Architect	ID02	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare list of all approvals needed for interior design work, with probable review time.			
BM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Building Maintenance Unit	ID03	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare list of all critical decisions, and the deadlines for making them, to be made by others in order to meet the schedule for the interior design work.			
CC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Communications Consultant	ID04	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare inventory of client's existing furnishings, annotated as to condition, colours, and fitness for use.			
CE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Civil Engineer	ID05	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare space needs report including existing space allocations, present shortfall and future needs.			
CM	<input type="checkbox"/>	Construction Manager	ID06	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Interview client and prepare report detailing client's perceptions and requirements about interior design themes.			
EC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Consultant	ID07	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare and present preliminary design concept plan.			
EE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Electrical Engineer	ID08	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare and present preliminary budget cost for concept plan.			
FC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Food Service Consultant	ID09	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare and confirm schedule of all spaces requiring interior design services.			
FE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Facade Engineer	ID10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare and present preliminary materials selection boards.			
FS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fire Services Consultant	ID11	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare options and cost study of ceiling systems including module dimensions, acoustic performance, provision for lighting and mechanical services.			
HE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hydraulics Engineer	ID12	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare options and cost study on raised floor systems.			
ID	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interior Designer	ID13	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare options and cost study on office partition systems.			
LA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Landscape Architect	ID14	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare options and cost study on floor covering materials.			
LS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Land Surveyor	ID15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare final finishes schedule for all spaces requiring interior design.			
ME	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mechanical Engineer	ID16	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare final cost plan for interiors work.			
OS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Specialists	ID17	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare final colour boards.			
PM	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Project Manager	ID18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Develop plan for and obtain client's approval of personnel office assignments.			
PP	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Project Programme Consultant	ID19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare final furniture layout plan.			
QS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quantity Surveyor	ID20	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Confirm fire resistance requirements of all proposed materials.			
RC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Restoration Consultant	ID21	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Provide specification writer with descriptions of all proposed finish materials.			
RD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rubbish Disposal Consultant	ID22	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Determine lead times for all custom-made and imported materials, advise architect and contractor if appointed.			
RE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Real Estate Consultant	ID23	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Confirm deadline for completion of lift car interior design with subcontractor.			
SE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Structural Engineer	ID24	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Confirm lighting type, location and level in all significant spaces, with building services engineer.			
TC	<input type="checkbox"/>	Traffic Consultant	ID25	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Confirm supply air flow patterns at draped walls with building services engineer.			
TE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation Engineer	ID26	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Confirm power supply and telephone systems locations for office partitions and means of housing same.			
TP	<input type="checkbox"/>	Town Planner	ID27	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Prepare tender conditions for interiors work, coordinate with construction manager.			
WE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wind Engineer	ID28	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Review tenders for interiors work, make recommendation to client.			
			ID29	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Perform manufacturing plant inspections for all custom-fabricated items.			
			ID30	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Oversee installation of interiors work items.			

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