Results without Authority
Controlling a Project When the Team Doesn't Report to You
By Tom Kendrick
(A book review by R. Max Wideman)

Introduction

Tom Kendrick is no stranger to these pages. In 2006 we reviewed his book *The Project Management Tool Kit* [link: http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/toolkit/intro.htm] a very useful reference book and a couple of years later he has written the current book. The title is beguiling because many project managers, especially those new to the discipline, feel burdened by the responsibility of producing *Results without Authority*. The subtitle poses a good question: How *do* you Control a Project When the Team Doesn't Report to You?

Notwithstanding Tom's years of experience with Hewlett Packard, we suspect that the question is somewhat overstated. "Your" team may not report to you in the traditional sense of the corporate hierarchical organization chart in which you have line responsibility for the care and keeping of your staff including salary and employment. However, you do have a responsibility for conducting productive work – upon which their continued employment depends!

If you are not sure about that, call your first project team meeting and see who shows up. Those who don't, without even an abject apology, are clearly not a part of your team. For those who do show up, assuming you exercise an appropriate degree of finesse, will be committed. Of course, if no one shows up, your project is probably not worth doing in the first place and you know where you stand.

As Tom explains:
> "When you're a project manager with a team of people who don't technically report to you, your challenge is to get results Without Authority. This book delivers proven techniques for controlling projects and managing diverse teams in a wide variety of situations, and bringing those projects to a successful closure. The concepts in this book are essential for all project managers, with or without authority, because they offer a productive alternative to "command and control" management techniques that can easily backfire."[1]

It goes without saying that you, yourself, must be thoroughly convinced of the righteousness of your project's outcome and can make an impassioned case for its execution.

Much as we have felt on numerous occasions that we would like to pound our fist on the table and tell someone to "Get on with it. Don't argue and do as you are told." We have equally learned that while this does satisfy the pounder, it produces no results other than flat resentment. By the same token, we rather wish that Tom had not placed so much emphasis on the word "controlling". In this present day of enlightenment, and knowledge workers, the concept of "command and control" is long outmoded. You don't *control* a project, you *lead* it!

Yes, yes, we know that the latest PMBOK® Guide is rife with the word "control" (just check out the index[2]) but you will notice that the references are to systems control – the control of things. The word is carefully avoided in the Project Human Resource Management chapter. There the operative word is "manage".

Book Structure

This book is simply laid out into ten chapters and two Appendices as follows:

1. Control of Projects
2. Control through Process
3. Control through Influence
4. Control through Project Metrics
5. Beginning Control with Project Initiation
6. Building Control through Project Planning
7. Maintaining Control during Project Execution
8. Tracking and Monitoring for Project Control
9. Enhancing Overall Control through Project Closure
10. Conclusion

Appendix A: Example Project Infrastructure Decisions
Appendix B: Selected References

As the author explains in Chapter 1:

"The first half of the book explores three elements of project control: process, influence, and measurement. Chapters 2 through 4 dig into the details and show how to apply them in your project environment. The second half of the book shows you when to use these three elements for control throughout the life of a typical project. *The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK Guide) from the Project Management Institute identifies five process groups: initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing. Chapters 5 through 9 map to these topics, describing how to make the ideas work for your project from its beginning to its end. Where the PMBOK Guide tends to assume that a project manager has formal power, the discussion throughout this book focuses on controlling project work even if you do not have much direct authority."[3]

Notwithstanding the comprehensive coverage and advice contained in this book, the author admonishes:

"Never overcomplicate your project with processes that aren't needed; if there are two ways to approach a project issue that are equally effective, always choose the simplest one."[4]

What we liked

We liked the way the book is laid out and its logical and progressive structure. The book contains much that is standard project management fare. That is, the sort of stuff that is repeated over and over in somewhat different forms by project management authors far and wide, especially those commissioned to write short articles for magazines and the Internet. However, this is necessary to complete the coverage of the subject.

What is refreshing are the snippets of wisdom culled from the personal experience of the author or his colleagues. For example:

"Effective project leaders identify opportunities to align what the project needs with what individuals want to do, and they assign responsibility for project activities accordingly."[5]

We are not sure we have seen this before but it is a very effective ploy. The reason why it works is because technical people are usually passionate about their expertise and if you give them an

opportunity to show off their skills, they will be happy with the assignment and tackle it with enthusiasm.

Another example:
> "Another key to influence is effective communication. Project leaders are either good communicators or they are not project leaders for long. Communication is the one absolutely undisputed responsibility owned by the project leader, regardless of project type, other responsibilities, or authority. To succeed and retain control, you must manage information and communicate effectively."[6]

The reason why this is true is simple. Without people there is no one to get anything done, but without communication, no one knows what to do. And the author goes on to explain:
> "Using the power of your pen, you can control your project through filtering and summarizing, and deciding how best to distribute information and when."[7]

This thought is further elaborated in Chapter 2 under Information Management.[8] Of course, this idea does require that your team actually reads the stuff you distribute, so make it relevant, concise and to the point. But it also needs to be transparent, not obscure.

Given the importance of communication thus expressed, is it not surprising that so little attention is given in the project management literature to the underlying skills required for this activity?

Another snippet of good information:
> "Some of your power to control and manage your project comes vicariously from others who do possess organizational power. Your sponsor can confer status on you by formally appointing you as manager (or at least leader) of the project; you can even offer to write the memo for your sponsor to sign or send that announces the start of the project and your responsibilities."[9]

Of course, if the "sponsor" is not willing to sign and/or send that missive, you know that s/he doesn't have the necessary power either – and your project may be doomed from the start!

On a related issue, isn't it interesting how, in that short text, "leader" is viewed as subservient to "manager"? And yet, in project management circles at least, project "leadership" is more highly valued than "managership".

Another piece of good advice:
Preferred communication styles vary a great deal, with some people preferring informal interactions to be verbal and others who prefer more distance and communications in writing. Uncovering these preferences is an important part of establishing a relationship with each of the members of your team. This can be a challenge, especially when the interpersonal differences between you and a contributor are significant or the team member is located far away. Nonetheless, to the best of your ability you need to minimize the effects of your cultural and other differences. This is easier said than done, but one tactic that helps is never to pass up a chance to visit distant team members, to see for yourself where and how they work. **Going alone is most effective, because traveling with other people can result in a "bubble" that creates a barrier to really understanding the places and people you visit."**[10]

From Chapter 5 onwards, the text is laced with short anecdotes illustrating the point at hand such as the "RACI" chart that displays levels of responsibility and the name stands for "Responsible; Accountable; Consulted; or Informed". The story goes like this:
> "Scott Beth, a senior manager with the XYZ paper company tells this story about starting

a project to convert the company's paper stock to recycled paper. After initial discussions with the sourcing manager for office and paper supplies, I asked her, 'Who's the Driver[11] for this project?' She said she wasn't sure, and we realized there really was no owner for that area. I agreed to be the Approver and to be accountable for the decision to convert to recycled paper. After discussing this, I asked the sourcing manager to own the Responsibility for making this change. We set up milestones for reviewing progress. When we clarified the RACI for the project, we immediately started making progress and easily met all the timing and expense goals for converting to recycled paper. Defining the roles and responsibilities, especially in writing, is a very effective way to secure the reliable commitments that you need to depend on to control any project."[12]

We were delighted to see Tom address one of our own particular hobbyhorses. About "Life Cycles and Methodologies" he says:

"Life cycles (or stage gates, phase reviews, or other sequential project timing structures) and methodologies are related in that they impose discipline on projects. Life cycles primarily serve to coordinate related projects, whereas methodologies strive to ensure consistency in how project work is done. Mandatory process aspects of either (or both) can significantly enhance your project control."[13]

Amen to that. Translation: Life cycles (or spans) are how you manage the project through its natural time span. Methodologies are how you go about handling the specific technology involved in producing the project's deliverable. Or, in other words, managing the project and managing the technology are two different things.

Downside

The text of this book pretty well runs the gamut of generally accepted project management practices, processes and techniques laid out in the sequence of the generic project life span. As such it tends to regurgitate generally accepted techniques and some bulleted lists that are to be found in most common, or rather simplified, project management literature. That's fine for those who want simple advice all in one place. Indeed, as it states on the back cover:

"Packed with invaluable guidance, this book will help novice and experienced project leaders get the best from their project teams."[14]

However, this does tend to miss a number of opportunities that we feel are germane to the subject of getting "Results without Authority". For example in Chapter 1 we read:

"Many projects that fail do so because the project leader lacks sufficient control to keep things moving towards a successful conclusion. Insufficient project control is a result of many factors: lack of authority, geographically distributed teams, excessive project change, competing priorities, and inadequate planning, just to name a few."[15]

It seems to us that these are all things that a competent project manager should be able to handle. One of the biggest omissions in this list, and the source of many project failures, and one that the project manager can do less about, is the matter of management support and management's creation of the right project environment.

Further, the same section observes:

"As leader of your project you must assume control, whether you possess organizational authority or not."[16]

This too seems a little disingenuous. If you are going to consume someone else's resources, you need

their (formal) permission to do so.

In a bulleted list of "Factors that Any Project Leader Can Control",[17] "Communication" is fourth on a list of ten items. Given that communication is the only way that a project manager can exercise any form of serious "control", we would have sung its praises and put it at the top of the list! Indeed, as we mentioned earlier:

> "Using the power of your pen, you can control your project through filtering and summarizing, and deciding how best to distribute information and when."[18]

And, in our view, foremost amongst all the things that need to be communicated, are the project's goals and objectives – that you must convey with such enthusiasm and passion that anyone who hears you is bound to "buy-in" and support your project. Assuming the project is worth doing in the first place, we feel that describing the product scope in this way will be the most powerful control influence that you have.

Under "Change Management" Tom observes:

> "One of the most problematic aspects of technical projects is a lack of control over specification changes. Solving this problem involves two things: freezing project scope when setting the project baseline, and adopting an effective process for managing changes throughout the remainder of the project."[19]

We are skeptical. If as premised by the book you are expected to deliver "Results without Authority" then without the necessary authority it is unlikely that you really can freeze the product scope and make it stick. On the contrary, if the boss wants something changed at the last moment, then you simply do what you are told.

The section on "Operating Style" lists the standard five sources of power (Position; Coercion; Reward; Expertise; and Personality).[20] What is missed in most texts on this topic, including this one, is the Power to generate enthusiasm, based on the goals and objectives of the project.

In a section titled: "Types and Uses of Project Metrics" we learn that:

> "There are three basic types of metrics, and each plays a different role in project management.
> 1. Predictive project metrics based on definition and planning information and help set realistic expectations for the project.
> 2. Diagnostic metrics based on current status and serve as indicators of progress and as timely reminders for risk response, problem solving, and decision-making.
> 3. Retrospective metrics assess how well the work you have completed was done and provide insight into process issues and recurring problems.
>
> Predictive project metrics are primarily used in project initiation and project planning."[21]

While these statements are true, we think they fall short of the best intent. Project management is not just about starting a project; it is as much about managing it to completion. So retrospective metrics, while necessary, simply serve the function of audit and accounting. Diagnostic metrics, as defined above simply mean you are a bystander watching and reporting on the ongoing saga. The serious project manager spends relatively more time with predictive metrics in continuously forecasting what still has to be done, how long this will take and hence the time of arrival. In our view, this is the most important function of the project manager – and the most difficult.[22]

Summary

This book is full of sound, practical, project management advice for carrying out IT and similar type projects. It is also laced with the practical wisdom that only comes from years of "Been there, done that".

Perhaps some of the soundest advice is characterized in the following anecdote entitled "Flattery can get you anywhere":

> "In the late 1980s, I was part of a large program created to consolidate hardware into a new state-of-the-art data center being established in a new European headquarters building in Geneva, Switzerland. We were to gather computer systems and other equipment from half-dozen older sites all over the city, and my part of the program was to manage moving all telecom equipment and packet-switching hardware used for worldwide data communications – while ensuring, of course, uninterrupted network access to all systems over the several months that it would take to relocate all computers.

> A central part of the new data center design was a massive patch panel through which all the internal and external communications were to be routed. As the time to begin installing my network hardware approached, I grew concerned that the patch panel was behind schedule. The empty panel frame had been erected in the data center, but the hardware that would fill it up was still sitting in the manufacturer's boxes. I dropped hints a few time to the team responsible for assembling this hardware, to no avail. On a program like this, there are always many competing priorities and tasks.

> A week before my first installation was scheduled, I approached the leader of the patching hardware installation team. Rather than complaining about the looming deadline, I asked if he would show me how the panel worked, so I could verify that everything was compatible. Together, we started opening boxes and he showed me how the parts fit together. I continued asking questions and opening boxes while he started snapping things together and screwing the components in place. After about forty-five minutes, he has installed about a dozen connections and wired them up. I was able to test my cables and fittings and verify that there were no mechanical mating problems or electrical faults. I thanked him for his help, and we both returned to other work.

> While I was grateful that some of the hardware I depended on was now installed, my real motive was to collect data for my weekly status report. In my summary for the beginning of my next report, I mentioned that I was now confident we could meet our schedules, based on the capable and effective efforts of my partner project leader. I praised his cooperation and expertise and publicly thanked him for his efforts.

> Because of the attention the status report generated, the patch panel infrastructure was fully installed in plenty of time. In addition, throughout the rest of my project, whenever I saw the other team leader in the data center, he always asked if I needed anything done."[23]

Interestingly, one of the parts that we found the most valuable is Appendix A. According to the title, this appendix provides a list of Example Project Infrastructure Decisions. To our eyes, it looks more like a checklist of questions you should ask to establish the project management requirements for your project.

In total there are 200 bulleted questions arranged under 23 sub-headings. Not all questions are relevant to all projects, of course, but scanning the list will trigger many thoughts otherwise overlooked.

At its very modest price, the book is worth buying just to have the Appendix.

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[1] Kendrick, T., *A Project Manager's Guide, Results without Authority*, AMACOM, New York, 2006, back cover

[2] A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Fourth Edition, Project Management Institute, 2008, Table of Contents

[3] Kendrick, T., *A Project Manager's Guide, Results without Authority*, p2

[4] Ibid, p3

[5] Ibid, p5

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid, p23

[9] Ibid, p80

[10] Ibid, p182 (emphasis added.)

[11] I.e. "Who is Responsible?"

[12] Kendrick, T., *A Project Manager's Guide, Results without Authority*, p106. (Text slightly simplified.)

[13] Ibid, p9

[14] Ibid, see back cover.

[15] Ibid, p1

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, p2

[18] Ibid, p5

[19] Ibid, p16

[20] Ibid, p32

[21] Ibid, p62

[22] "Using Predictive Metrics" and their use in the difficulties of negotiating a viable project with your sponsor are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

[23] Ibid, pp205-206