



From a Tactical Resource Manager to Strategic Resource Manager Soft Skills Make the Difference

Resource Management Institute

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From a Tactical Resource Manager to Strategic Resource Manager SOFT SKILLS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

This white paper provides clarity around both the need and the methods to turn yesterday's tactical resource manager into a more strategic resource manager.

Introduction

Resource managers and the discipline they serve are both growing rapidly. They deal with a broad array of constituencies including service delivery teams, HR, Finance, sales, business unit leaders and more. Their day is full of interactions, sometimes difficult situations, all in the quest to help service providers get the right person in the right place at the right time to successfully execute a project. Too often, the role of the Resource Manager (RM) can be relegated to an administrative role vs. the much more strategic role it should be, given the importance of properly aligning talent to work to conduct successful projects and deliver superior services. This white paper also equally applies to the role of the Workforce Manager or any other title for professionals conducting resource and workforce management.

Success in today's service economy means leading with great processes to align the right people to the work that needs to get done. Some examples of the industries where good resource and workforce management are mission critical include firms providing services to external clients including (but not limited to):

- Professional and Consulting services
- Marketing and Creative agencies
- Accounting, Audit, Tax and Advisory services
- Law Firms

For firms or organizations serving internal clients those might include (but are not limited to):

- Enterprise/IT teams
- Product Development organizations

While RM process excellence is very important, today's RM professional must also be able to identify, articulate and manage every allocation of resources using effective communications and interaction skills with all responsible constituencies. This includes all aspects of constituent interactions - examples:

- Expressing RM project allocations in terms of best fit, economic impacts and resource specific considerations
- Addressing resource conflicts with appropriate soft skills to turn conflicts into resource solutions
- Building confidence in resource management processes with constituents leading to increased adoption of RM necessary processes and constituent support.

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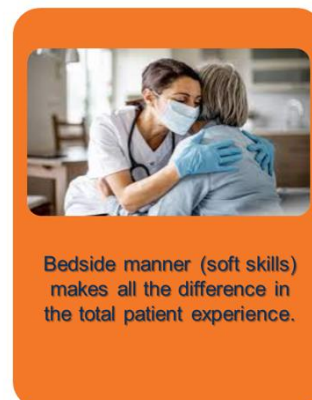
- Becoming the 'advisor' to constituents looking to solve both tactical and strategic RM business needs and leading to improved business outcomes

The key difference between a tactically focused resource manager is one who is primarily managing staffing activities (administration), and the strategically focused resource manager who recognizes that good RM is finding a balance of serving the economic needs of the business while meeting the priorities of our most important assets, people! We believe good soft skills make all the difference for enabling the resource manager to be able to perform their role while achieving target strategic outcomes from your resource management initiatives. Those outcomes would include better project performance, lower cost of delivery, and improved employee engagement leading to lower attrition and improved employee morale.

This white paper addresses that all important lynchpin of the people who conduct resource and workforce management in support of your projects for clients (internal or external) – resource and workforce management processes and specifically the soft skills of the people who must perform today's role of the Resource Manager!

How We Do It is as (or more) Important as What We Did

Analogies from our daily lives have always helped me gain perspective on things I needed to better understand, or follow, or in this case explain to the reader. A doctor must deploy a range of technology, medicine, skills, and facilities to diagnose and treat our illness(es). Most are trained well to do just that. But all of us have at some point heard about a doctor, or better yet had an experience with one who demonstrated a great bedside manner - good soft skills! Good bedside manner (soft skills) makes all the difference in the total doctor experience. How would your delivery teams (desperate for getting their project staffed quick and with competent people) describe the bedside manner of your resource management team? What about the people who are being assigned to their next project – did they see their personal desires and needs as having been considered in addition to the needs of the company? Did the RM truly understand the needs on both the supply and demand side of the equation?



A Resource Manager's soft skills makes all the difference in the quality of their interactions

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The concept of a 'good bedside manner' is no different in the business-to-business environment. As your services resources are deployed in the field, they are not simply performing service tasks. Rather, they: 1) are important assets of the company who have choices about where they choose to work 2) have skills development needs and career aspirations that are important to them when it comes to the types of projects they are assigned to. The delivery teams responsible for the projects being conducted are also concerned about 1) competent people being assigned to their projects 2) total project needs are being properly considered when it comes to staffing.

So, while your recruiting process hopefully identified great resource management talent, and your training programs educated the new hires on the intricacies of your company, delivery functions, and other job relevant information, did your onboarding prepare your resource managers to effectively operate and interact with the various constituents critical to effective project staffing and execution?

To be successful, Resource Managers need a well rounded set of skills:



General Business/Company – *“foundational”* - back office, company and HR norms of how does your company conduct business – e.g. time and expense tools/policies, security and HR training, performance review process training, etc.

RM Process – *“required hard skills”* the core of executing the Resource Manager role – knowledge of RM policies, practices, data, and tools

Professional Skills – *“necessary soft skills”* – the ART of being a good Resource Manager

Answering some simple questions about your resource management team may tell you a lot:

- Is the resource management function viewed as an administrative group, or skilled advisors to those needing qualified resources to do important project work?
- Is the RMO (Resource Management Office) viewed as an important element of a broader employee engagement strategy?
- Are we listening well to the needs of our constituents before we assign people to projects?
- Do we recognize the differences in what is important to our constituents, for example the delivery/service resources vs. client management functions, finance, HR, or whomever else might be in the resource management and service delivery loop?

If your answers to one or more of these questions above are not the answers you would like, then perhaps you have some soft skills development to do with your team.

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Transforming the Tactical Resource Manager to a Strategic Resource Manager

Each company has a different starting position for solving this problem since the diagnosis must start with a specific root cause analysis and understanding of what skills your team members do have.

There are many different approaches to gaining a fact-based diagnosis of your team's current skills deficiencies but given the state of resource management talent in today's market in respect to soft skills, the symptoms are not hard to uncover, and the underlying reasons become quickly obvious.

The table below identifies core skills required to develop a strategically focused resource manager and some descriptions/symptoms of how to assess where your areas of need may be:

Core Skills Area	Commentary
Expectation management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So much of what we do in business is about properly setting expectations and then delivering on those anticipated outcomes. Good soft skills include being able to define, communicate, and seek agreement to mutual expectations between the various constituents the RM interacts with. Do you/your RMs under promise and over deliver? Is input on your RM function or the role you play as an RM positive, neutral, or negative overall? Meeting or exceeding expectations of the various cross-functional teams you work with is critical.
Relationship management and becoming the Trusted Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People respond better where a good relationship exists and the RMs are trusted to perform their mission critical role at a consistently high level. Therefore, making the proper investment in building trusted relationships based on mutual understanding and production of mutually beneficial outcomes is key. This is an area where some survey input on performance of the RMs in their role can provide invaluable input. The general 'noise' level amongst the team can also be good indicator of how the RMs are viewed by their cross-functional constituencies.
Communications including Active Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In every aspect of business, good communications, both written and verbal are essential. For RMs, this is a critical skill. Great communicators recognize at every interaction there is an opportunity to have a positive reaction or a negative reaction. It is perhaps the most complex of all skills required to be a good RM. At the front of the communications loop is active listening – do you really understand the needs and desires of your constituents? Did you probe/peel back the onion to be sure you understand the request at hand? Do you understand the role of the person whom you are speaking to? What about the medium you use to communicate, e.g. email vs. live vs. text vs.??? Did your tone and content in delivering the message lead to a positive reaction vs. a negative one? Great communicators are infinitely better Resource Managers.
Conflict Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Navigating issues – and turning difficult situations and conflict into a demonstration of your problem-solving capabilities is the essence of being a

	<p>great RM. By nature, our work is constantly solving complex problems with lots of variables. Do your issues consistently involve fighting fires, or good examples of how you again demonstrated your control of complex situations leading to desired outcomes? Cross-functional relationships are easily eroded during times of conflict or issue management situations.</p>
Meeting Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows, in a typical business, often more than half our time is spent in business meetings, making meeting management a priority for soft skills development. Do meetings start with a clear sense of purpose, are they productive in achieving the objectives set for the meeting, are there defined outcomes and clear accountabilities resulting from the meeting? Great soft skills include effective meeting management: how we set up a meeting, how they are conducted, and how outcomes of meetings have clear next steps, decisions made, and accountabilities to decisions made. Meetings which end without objectives being met, or unresolved problems and conflict are clear indicators of where meeting management skills need improvement.
Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change management is fundamental to the management of any key business process. Resource management will always be a process discipline which will benefit from continuous improvement, in particular where we are asking the organization to break old habits and do things in a different way. Good change management is comprised of both CM best practices, and the delivery of change management where soft skills are critical. All of the core skills discussed in this table are needed to execute good change management. When not done well, signs of resistance, confusion, rejection, slow or improper adoption are all potential examples of poor soft skills.

Attacking the 'tactical to strategic RM' transformation is best served by a formal program that is specific to the role of the resource or workforce manager, and with a fundamental understanding of what conducting project-based work entails.

Summary

As resource and workforce management organizations look to move beyond being viewed as tactically focused administrative functions, the ability to engage constituents at all levels and situations in a more consultative manner leading to better strategic outcomes is mission critical. Today's RM professional must be able to identify, articulate and manage a strategically focused process of keeping the supply of qualified resources in balance with the demand for work. Good soft skills underpin the effectiveness of the RM role.

About the Resource Management Institute (RMI)

The Resource Management Institute is dedicated to the advancement of resource and workforce management thought leadership, best practices and standards, globally recognized credentials that certify resource management expertise, and tools and resources necessary for effective and efficient management of human capital-intensive businesses. The Resource Management Institute was created to provide the resource and workforce management community a vehicle to advance the discipline of resource and workforce management, and further the interests of the people who make up this community and the companies they work for. Visit us at www.resourcemanagementinstitute.com and on [LinkedIn](#).

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