5. THE PROJECT MANAGER

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Project management 101 *by Zavanak*

5.4 Project management in real life

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Three misconceptions

1

The project manager's sole responsibility is to deliver the project output on time, on budget and meet the required standard of quality.

Today's project manager certainly needs to do this, but also needs to focus on the strategic impetus for the project and the benefits which are sought.

2

The project manager is involved from the very start of the project.

Very often the project is well into the planning stage before the project manager is appointed, by which time their ability to change aspects of the project may be severely constrained.

3

The project manager sees the project all the way through to the end.

In many projects - especially large ones - the project can be led by a series of different people over its duration.

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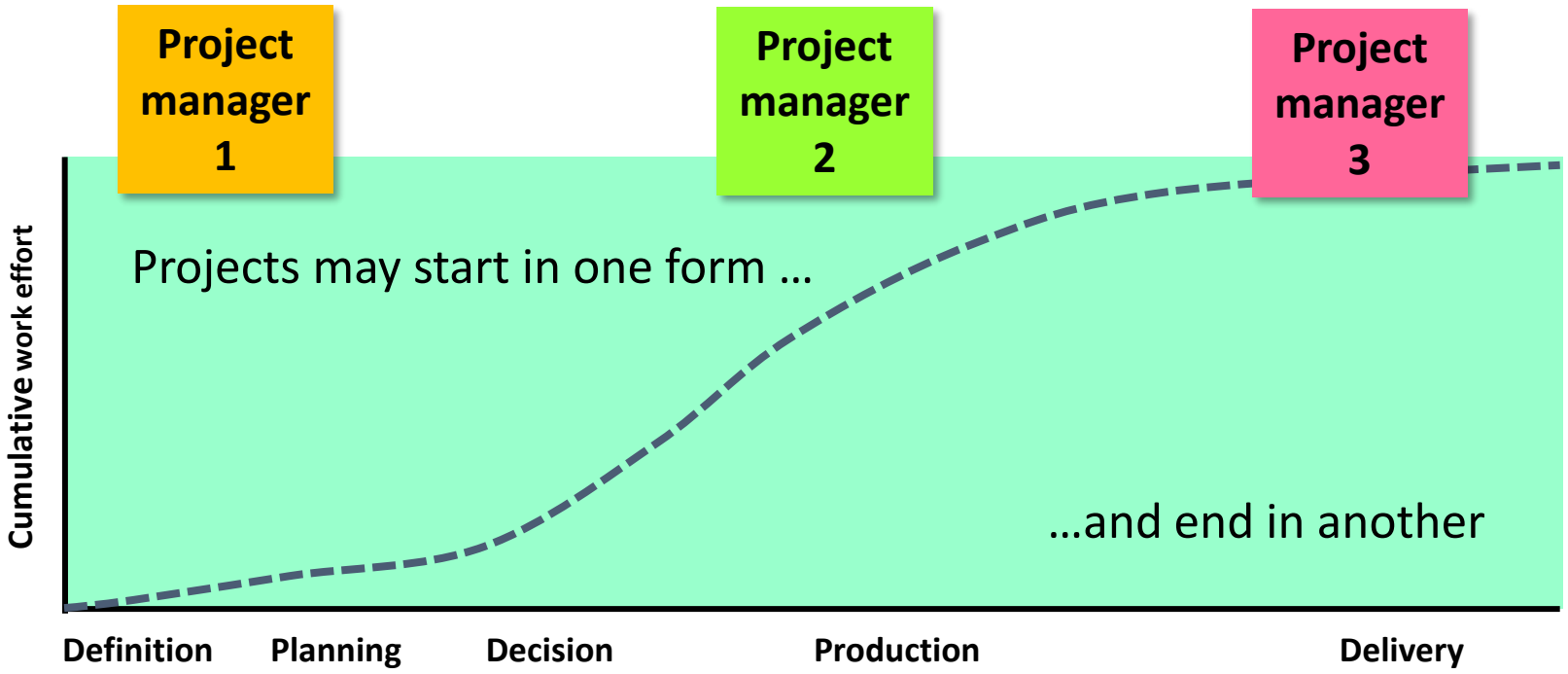
The project manager may change



Early tasks are **preparatory**:	Middle tasks are **progressive**:	Later tasks are **conclusive**:
• Project strategy	• Solution design	• Achieve delivery
• Budgeting and scheduling	• Solution development	• Resolve issues
• Project design	• Solution delivery	• Get finished
• Negotiating	• Management within plan	• Get paid

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Three realities

1. **The project may be a part-time role for the project manager.**
   The project manager may be an operational manager who has been given a project to run as part of their responsibilities. Their management style will have to switch between running operational and project activities.

2. **The project manager may be running more than one project.**
   The project manager may have a number of projects to run. Those projects may have different sponsors, different success criteria and present very different challenges and risks.

3. **The project itself may be a 'poisoned chalice'.**
   Someone may be charmed into taking on a project without realising it is already set on a course for failure. They should only be prepared to take it on if it is re-planned and re-organised on their terms. Otherwise, better to say 'no' now rather than fail later.

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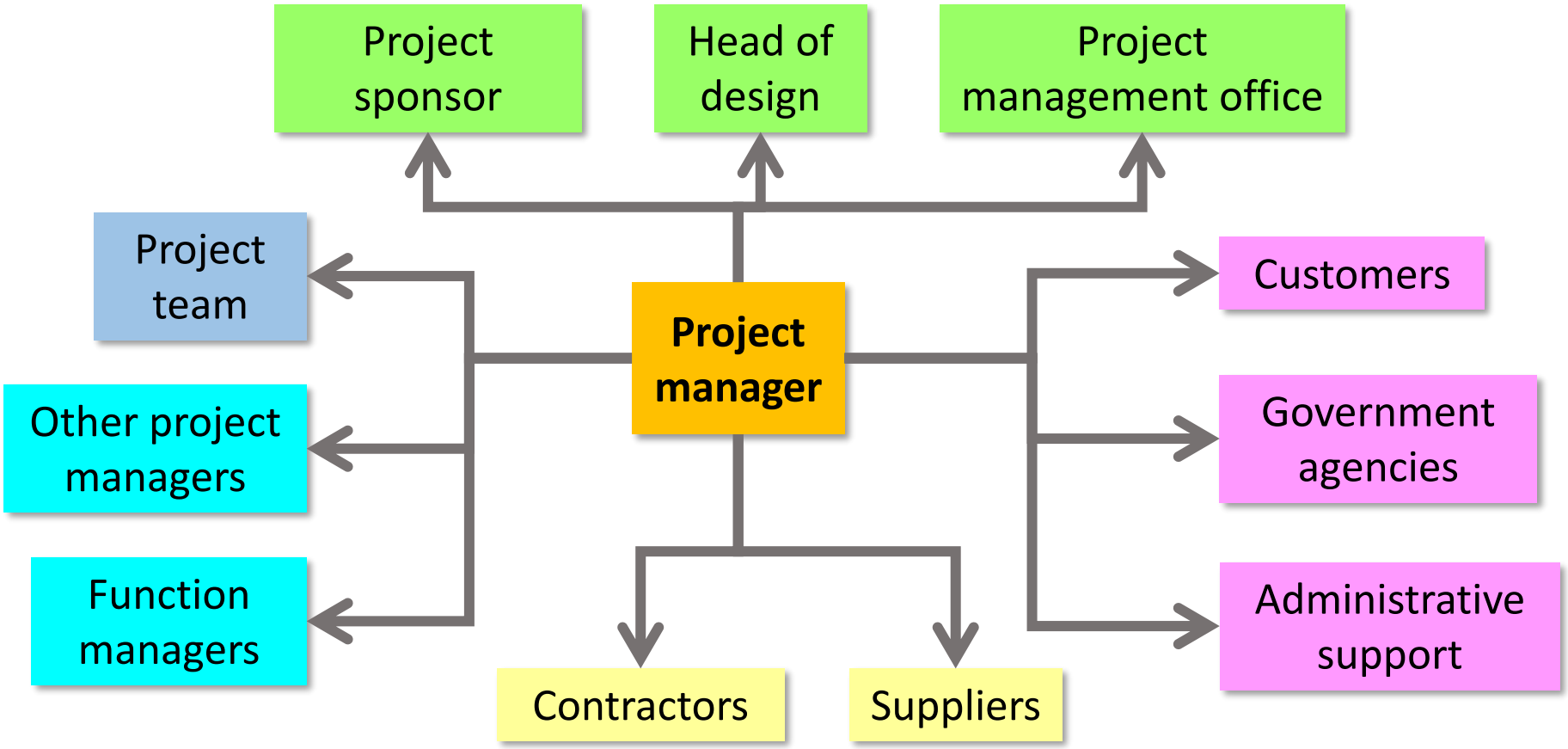
Working with stakeholders



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Why stakeholders matter

The old-fashioned view

Give instructions, manage the team, focus on the job.

Stakeholders – even senior ones – have limited influence on the project manager's position once they are in place.

The new reality

Pay attention to the world around the project, and the behaviour of influential people.

Stakeholders – even ordinary people – can exert decisive influence over the project manager's position.

A project manager can be caught out by the intervention of a stakeholder whose power they had not been aware of.

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Navigating workplace politics

Be visible, get your good work noticed

Share the credit when it's due

Understand the agendas of people you want on your side

Bolster their egos

Maintain your network

Be nice to junior staff; they are often gatekeepers

Get on well with senior decision-makers and influencers

Be indispensable

Judge what you say; people have long memories

Confront devious political behaviour

Don't let people manipulate you

If revenge is deserved, serve it cold

Don't forget: ultimately you are judged on results

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Kipling's companions

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling, *Just so stories*, 1902

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Dealing with mistakes

Own up - everyone makes mistakes

Bolster confidence – show you know how to avoid a recurrence

Apologise – only if you did something you shouldn't have; acting in good faith does not demand an apology

Explain the circumstances – why the mistake occurred; were expectations too demanding or a deadline too tight?

Be specific – declare the exact mistake and its probable consequences

Empathise – show you understand how anyone adversely affected by the mistake will feel

Have a response – offer an initial proposal for how to fix the mistake

Fail once and you'll usually be forgiven; but don't fail at the same thing a second time

A toxic working culture makes all this very difficult to achieve. A no blame culture enables mistakes to be quickly revealed, and sorted out sooner.

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Coaching

An informal, but disciplined, process in which the individual receives advice on how they can best perform their role and also develop their personal potential

Senior manager

- Insights from experience
- **Critical friend**
- How to delegate more confidently
- **How to navigate sensitive areas**
- How to get to a key player in the organisation
- **May be a component of a future leaders programme**

Project manager

Team member

- How best to approach tasks and problems
- **How best to work with others**
- How to become an effective manager

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