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tion's mission. Remind team members why that mission matters and how necessary their contribution is to success.

Make-A-Wish, which fulfills wishes of children who have been diagnosed with critical illnesses, regularly holds "Mission Moments," during which staff and volunteers put aside current work to talk about the recipients and the impact the wish has on children, families and communities. All levels of the organization participate in these moments—from senior leadership to project teams to operations. This helps keep the focus on the children benefiting from our mission, rather than the needs of individual volunteers and employees.

Lack of track record. The discipline and value of project management isn't well-known at some non-profits. This can make buy-in and engagement from teams and sponsors difficult. However, it is possible to overcome this through the support of a CEO or other top executive who can champion project management as part of the organization's culture.

My organization reintroduced the role of project manager nearly five years ago after it had been gone for a period. It took time to bring senior management on board, but once that happened, responsibilities grew exponentially. For instance, our CEO became committed to formalizing and embedding project management across the organization and pushed for broader use of project management tools. This kind of highly visible support from senior management can be crucial for getting teams to take new project management processes—and project managers themselves—seriously.

Project managers make it possible for those who are serving their communities to spend more of their time actually doing that. If done right, maturing project management practices at a mission-driven organization can deliver what all stakeholders, from recipients of goods and services to donors to volunteers, want: a more efficient organization that can better focus on its core mission. **PM**

> **Project managers make it possible for those serving their communities to spend more of their time actually doing that.**

Trevor Stasik, CAPM, is a business analyst at Make-A-Wish, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

A New Kind of Program Manager

A different role emerges to guide complex software projects.

By Mario Gerard, PMP

As more organizations seek to build the latest and greatest tech advances, many of them are seeking a new type of program manager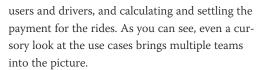: a technical program manager (TPM). Though this is a relatively recent role in the tech industry, TPMs have gained significant prominence over the last five years.

The role replaces the typical project or program manager job with a marriage of two distinct responsibilities, software architect and program manager. The reason for the evolution and growth of this role is simple: Project and program managers are more effective when they thoroughly understand and can communicate effectively about the underlying technology they are responsible for building.

The TPM's core responsibility is to lead the buildout of complex software products. Large tech companies now have disparate teams that need to enable each other so they can effectively deliver on their common goals. This means that the people leading these project teams must be very knowledgeable about the software being created, and they must also be able to interact effectively with the many other teams across the organization. Technical know-how and expert communication skills are both necessary to articulate the inner workings and finer points of the software being developed.

TPMs in Action

Take, for example, a tech company developing a ride-sharing app. The company likely would have more than 30 teams focusing only on the various end-user use cases. Each team would be responsible for building various pieces of the app, including creating user accounts, setting up payment methods, uploading profile pictures, getting riders' location info, estimating the fares, sending push notifications to drivers, facilitating communication between users and drivers, and calculating and settling the payment for the rides. As you can see, even a cursory look at the use cases brings multiple teams into the picture.

This is where a TPM becomes so important. Every team building a technology product is working on multiple projects, and the team's TPM aims to drive his or her pieces of the puzzle to excellence. But the TPMs also are constantly working to understand and bring to life the vision of the product manager, who is engaging with cross-functional teams to manage both upstream and downstream dependencies. Because they are negotiating to unblock and help speed up the team's delivery, TPMs are like a CEO or COO of the software development program. They are ready to do whatever it takes to enable the team.

In addition, the dawn of microservices—in which applications are built as a suite of modular services, each supporting a specific business goal—has added to the overhead of communication. For example, a mobile application that has several features, each having its own microservice for users to sign in, search and process payments, increases the need for skilled communicators.

If you are building a product or service with technology as its backbone, you are likely going to have many dependencies across teams, which means someone needs to be responsible for all the back and forth—the TPM.

As a principal TPM at Oracle, I work across several teams to drive programs that span multiple business units. Since Oracle is a technology company at its core, it is essential that the people managing its programs have a solid base of project management skills as well as sharp technical acumen to effectively communicate and resolve issues.

While the new role is mostly found at tech organizations, I believe that will change because traditional organizations tend to follow the trends that start at tech leaders. As tech becomes the core of more products and services—at both tech companies and nontech companies—demand for TPMs will rise. Eventually, I expect it will be a cornerstone role in tech and nontech organizations alike. **PM**

Mario Gerard, PMP, is a principal technical program manager at Oracle, Seattle, Washington, USA.

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