



Nordic Project Zone

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6th Annual Nordic Project Program
and Portfolio Management Summit



Finn Olsen Tram

Senior PMO Manager

NGC Medical S.p.A.

Interview

Managing Virtual Project Teams

Thank you for finding time for us Finn! Before we get started, tell us a bit more about yourself – how did you find a way into project management?

During my final years of studying Engineering, I took a few alternative courses like project management and management & organisation. Already at this stage it was evident that strictly classical engineering would not be my dominant field.

In my first job, I worked as a project administrator and I quickly got my own areas to fill-in. At this job, I was even touching on different areas as a „trainee“ such as: marketing, quality, account management, and so forth.

You are working now with NGC Medical S.p.A., can you tell us a little bit more about what you do there?

I am building and managing a new PMO, having a pool of project managers running projects in the EMEA region. I'm building capabilities, adding maturity and getting staff to excel. Most of all, I'm creating a PMO that works for the business and provides benefits for business. Information and internal marketing is an important element, and not simply a „quality and governance controlling entity“.

You are working as Senior PMO Manager, mainly focusing on implementing PMOs that covers a number of countries in Europe, Middle East and Africa. In your opinion, what is challenging about project management when some of the project team contributions come from remote parts of the world?

It is very important that you understand the settings that the project is running within. That could be a west European, lean and efficient back office function that delivers a solution to an immature young organisation where the business culture is substantially different. As the project manager in such settings, you need to be able to efficiently communicate with both parties and manage the gap in-between, eliminating the frustration it may else create. Communication is vital here, but also the right communication.

What is then the right communication? Well, timely, accurate, and understandable – meeting the receiver at the level they operate at, and most of all to listen and learn. If you try to force such projects, your success will be short-lived. The same goes when you stop being humble, listening and learning more about your project environment.

Can you provide any interesting anecdotes about managing virtual project teams?

Imagine you have a team developing a very technical solution – like modelling the Danish sewage system out of India. The terms used are not translated into English – it is a long list of database connections that do not make sense. Try to imagine for yourself, a very large office space with engineers from India arranged with small desks in an endless row.

Go and meet the team in India. Add a small token to each member of the team's table. Now you've got a team in the endless landscape that stands out. It is easy to

see for all the others that this team is special, that they are appreciated in Denmark. Respecting the business culture calls for frequent acknowledgements that can be consumed and used for their career flow – this is much needed here. Thus, send a diploma to the manager of the person, and have the manager to pass on the diploma to the staff member.

If you make an effort as project manager, you can raise the bar and get a team that loves to work for you. If you follow this simple recipe, you are on your path to having a successful team in India. Note: this model will not necessarily work for other countries and regions. Find the essential local element and use it well. In my session, I'll elaborate and add a bit of theory on this topic.

Any feelings of isolation and disconnection from the team have a direct correlation to the motivation of the virtual team member. Can you provide any advice about how to keep people motivated in this case?

If you can master the „coffee-machine talk“ in-between your virtual team members, then a lack of motivation is not originating from the virtual part. In my session, we will look at a few options to create this “talk” environment.

Just a side note - If you are in the Headquarters of the company, then don't assume you are right or have the right solution just because you come from the HQ. Listen, learn and understand - as you already know you use a remote team for a reason. Leverage this reason!

It's possible that your virtual team all thinks and acts the same way. However, more and more virtual teams consist of people from multiple countries and cultures. What is your experience regarding managing virtual teams with cultural differences?

I'll say that different cultures can even be seen between offices that are on one and the other side of a parking lot.

My experience is, if you don't understand the cultural differences and you ignore them, your communication plan will not be efficient. On the other hand, if you stereotype the cultural landscape to a black and white level and don't assess personal needs, you may overdo it.

You are speaking at the Nordic Project Zone this year; can you tell us a little bit more about what we can expect from your session? What are the 3 key take-aways the attendees will get from your presentation?

There is a need for the participant to reflect on the statements within my presentation; listen, assess and plan your changes. If you can do the same in your own virtual team environment – listen, assess and plan your changes for your team, I'm certain you will see improvement.

To be more specific, you will learn about and see examples about how to find the “what's in it for me” for the virtual team member. Indeed, you will see a way to analyse the

virtual team setting and alter your communication not only to the virtual team member, but also other important stakeholders in the virtual team atmosphere. Finally, you will get some ideas to help understand culture and virtual team dynamics. You will get some inspiration on simple, yet effective changes you can apply back home.

Thank you for your responses Finn!

Finn will talk about Managing Virtual Project Teams at Nordic Project Zone on November 17th at 2:15 pm in the Plenary Room.

About Finn Olsen Tram

Finn is implementing PMOs that covers a number of countries in Europe, Middle East and Africa, where some of the project team contributions come from remote parts of the world. A part of his work is therefore to ensure the virtual teams across a diverse list of countries, staff types, time zones, cultures and can operate efficiently and effectively.

As a Senior PMO Manager, Finn works out of Italy, building a new PMO with the purpose to scale from national to EMEA wide coverage on project execution – including agile and lean principles. Most recently, Finn served as PMO Manager for Radiometer Medical, an acute care diagnostic solutions company based in Copenhagen. Prior to Radiometer, Finn was the EMEA Enterprise PMO Manager for Intergraph, a global engineering and geo-spatial software and solutions provider. Earlier in his career, Finn held a variety of project management positions at various multinational corporations. Finn holds a Master's of Science from the Technical University of Denmark and holds several project management qualifications, including IPMA B, PRINCE 2, P30, and ScrumMaster certifications.

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