

Interview with :Frans Cousse: Project Manager

Interview by : Frank Turley

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Job Title: My career as a Project Manager

Introduction

Frans is an experienced project manager and I interviewed him about his career, how it started, what kind of skills did he acquired, the kind of opportunities that came up, career directions, etc...

Q1: What did you do in college and what was your first job?

- Study: Technical studies in Electronics
- First Job: As a technician responsible for maintenance & improvement of photo finishing production (1975)

Q2: What kind of experience did you have before your first PM role?

Mainly active in aftersales support jobs, going from bench service technician to hardware onsite and OS/software support. Those jobs had 3 main streams being reactive support (repair of broken items), preventive maintenance (hardware and software), and **New Installs**.

The **New Installs** did follow a streamlined method and it could be considered as a small project, so these **New Installs** were my first projects.

Q3: What was your first project as a PM and how did it go?

My first project that allowed me to formally apply a structured PM method based on PMI's 5 process groups was in 1998. The project delivered according to the defined scope & quality, though timeline and budget may have slipped as far as I can remember. However, the overall result was very much appreciated by both involved parties (customer and employer).

Q4: What was your best project and why?

The so-called "Europeanisation Project" scope was a technical project to create a computer system management platform to automate and standardize the system operations tasks for 350 systems spread over Europe and Asia.

Why:

- It was a project with high visibility within the company impacting 2 out of the 3 regions
- Quality was key as any error would impact finance and operation on a few million-customers
- It set our team in the spotlight

Other information:

- It created an increased operational efficiency
- It was fun working with different cultures
- It was a challenge to work with remote teams, the Asia based teams never met in person
- It was my technical knowledge area, so I could guide/challenge the teams on technical levels as well
- 360° evaluation was exceptional, from project team, management (customer) and end-users

Q5: What was your worst project and why?

This was my first outsourcing project in 2018

- Customer reorganized (sponsor company was taken over by a competitor) during project initiation phase leading to an undefined scope extension (scope quantification was adapted; however, requirements were not re-aligned due to unclear responsibilities at the sponsor level)
- Not able to perform correct assessments (unclear scope)
- Customer internal debates on requirements during execution
- Budget issues
- Project staffing issues (we could not get hold of people with required knowledge level)

Finally, the project was put on hold by our management.

Q6: What are the top 5 skills that a PM should have?

- Communication
- Financials
- Team builder
- Affinity with understanding the project subject
- Planning & Scheduling



Q7: What is the best advice you have received as a PM?

Deliver according to your scope, that's it.

Q8: What courses have you done and why?

As a preparation for the PMP exam:

- Introduction to project management
- Risk Management
- Finance for Projects
- Scheduling and Cost Control
- Leadership
- Quality Control
- Management of Change
- Coaching for Excellence
- Accelerated PMP certification preparation

I have also done the following courses:

- Using MS Project
- Effective presentation skills
- Preparation for SCRUM master certification

Q9: How has your PM career developed?

It went from initial execution of task lists to becoming a technical project team member. The next phase was being responsible for technical solutions and realization, and finally, leading the teams in performing the project track from initiation, planning, executing, reporting and controlling up to final delivery and closure.

Q10: How did you get into programme management?

My responsibility as PM extended and I had to guide multiple stream PMs within a programme.

Q11: As a programme manager, what did you monitor and what tool did you use?

- Budget, resources and quality
- MS Excel
- Planning MS Project

Q12: What advice do you have for a young PM today?

- Listen 80%, speak/write 20%
- Communicate honestly, clearly and with respect
- You will be treated as you treat yourself

Q13: What is the best way to broaden your PM experience?

- Continuous learning & re-invent yourself
- Give yourself at least 30 minutes a day to improve your PM skills eg: Reading, Podcasts...