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A Different Kind of Project Management

Project management has evolved since the time companies first realized the value of developing systems and processes to complete jobs on time. Yet, just completing projects on time is not enough in this day and age—jobs need to be completed successfully, and deploying an approach to repeat that success is crucial. Systems, people, software and management skills must be in place to achieve ongoing success in the modern world of information and communications technology (ICT).

Multisite technology rollout projects are often performed in a short time frame, making it more challenging for project managers to complete each project on time and within budget, while utilizing local field resources outside of their own company.

With the multitude of variables in project management and the increased number of variables associated with multisite technology rollouts, effective approaches are vital to a company's success. When it comes to multisite project management, there are a variety of subtleties that must be examined in the process to successfully manage and complete these ICT projects.

Shorter-term Multisite Technology Rollouts

Project management for the ICT contractor manifests itself in a variety of project types. The familiar tenant fit-out, which could be a single floor, multiple floors or a campus-based project, can be challenging. However, contractors can usually plan for enough time in the schedule to allow for mishaps, changing scopes of work and other unforeseen incidents. With a longer time frame and typically just one customer to deal with at a time, problems that arise can usually be corrected and the project can often remain on schedule.

Technology Rollout Categories

Category	Work Intensity per Site Location	Time Frame per Site Location	Examples of Work per Site Location
1	Short	1 day or less	1 demarc extension and router install
2	Medium	2 to 6 days	20 category 6 cables and 5 VoIP phones installed
3	Long	7 or more days	30 access points and category 5e cables for a warehouse Wi-Fi network

TABLE 1: Technology rollouts are classified based on work intensity and duration.

With the growing amount of merger, acquisition and business franchising activity, voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), Wi-Fi, digital signage, moves, adds and changes (MACs) and a host of other IP-based technologies are being deployed using the same process across dozens, hundreds or even thousands of sites for one customer. These multisite technology rollouts have created a demand for a higher level of project management. Technology rollout companies whose core business is in multisite deployments require effective and established processes and methodologies to complete these projects. They also need to employ individuals with highly competent project management skills to tackle the multitude of road blocks that are presented when managing local resources and end users at multiple sites.

Multisite technology rollout projects are often performed in a short time frame, making it more challenging for project managers to complete each project on time and

within budget, while utilizing local field resources outside of their own company. As shown in Table 1, technology rollouts are typically classified based on work intensity and duration as either category 1, category 2 or category 3. Classifying a technology rollout provides a better perspective on the type of management style required to ensure a successful project.

Category 1 multisite technology rollouts are more common than category 2 and 3, and due to their shorter duration they require a significantly higher degree of project management before and during the implementation. It takes significant skill for a project manager and project team to successfully complete single-day category 1 rollouts across a variety of sites. Continuously executing each site to a customer's satisfaction for weeks or months on end until all sites are completed presents a variety of challenges. Problems with deployment, infrastructure, time constraints, materials and individual person-

alities at any given location can arise. Project managers must have the skills and empathy towards the people involved to succeed in the face of these challenges.

A Technology Rollout Company's Project Management Team

Minimizing the number of managers on the internal team can help streamline communications and increase speed of deployments. For category 1 technology rollouts, the following levels of management are recommended:

- ▶ **Program manager**—Provides overall support, ensures overall quality of project and ensures projects are completed to customer specifications.
- ▶ **Project manager (PM)**—Serves as single point of contact to customer and manages all aspects of the rollout.
- ▶ **Project facilitator (PF)**—Manages all aspects of local resources and site contacts, including scheduling and job performance assurance (PF reports to PM).

Basic Management Team

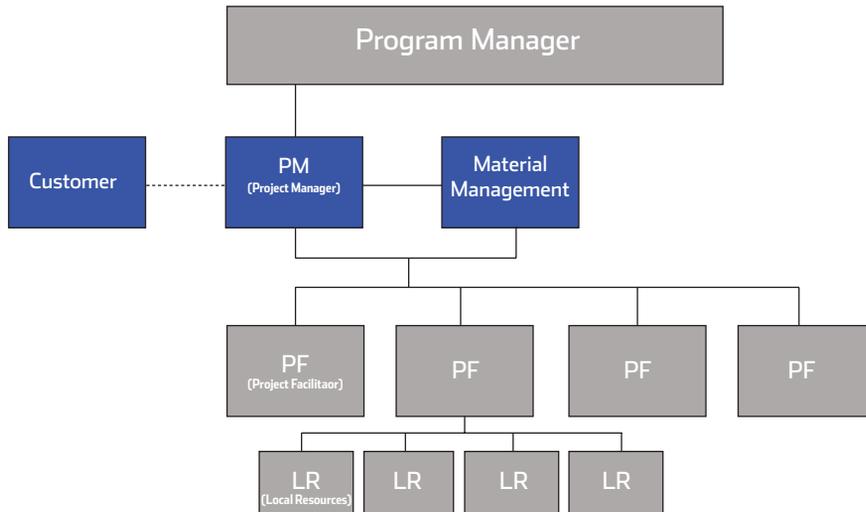


FIGURE 1: The basic management structure for a technology rollout company involves the program manager, the project manager and the project facilitator.

- ▶ **Material manager**—A warehouse manager whose team primarily works with project facilities and manages the provision of material and equipment for the project.

Within the management realm, the PF should be lifting the heaviest load per site on the local level, followed by the PM who interfaces with the customer and manages the PF, and then the program manager who performs overall quality assurance. These roles can vary based on the management system that a technology rollout company deploys and the scope of the project. The actual titles of these key roles can also differ depending on a company's internal designations. However, the critical roles that each of the individuals serve is essential for overall management and success of the rollout. See Figure 1 for an

example of a basic technology rollout management team.

It is important for each individual on a technology rollout team to understand their management role and how their input will be effectively communicated within the team. As technology rollouts start to heat up and involve an increasing number of individuals, each manager should pay attention to common sense principles surrounding communications. If problems arise, or if there is something that does not make sense in the field, then it needs to be appropriately communicated, discussed and resolved with the right individuals. Each player in the system should utilize a chain of communication that is appropriate and effective.

The fundamental structure of the management team should remain stable to accomplish a successful end result. Consider a small multisite technology rollout

consisting of 10 category 1 sites. The technology rollout company could also have several other customers and projects happening simultaneously. This could be 100, 200 or even thousands of sites. Consequently, it is not a matter of managing just the 10 category 1 sites; it is a combination of all of the customer sites that need to be managed. The ability to successfully project-manage this many sites, all with varying requirements, really comes down to the technology rollout company's ability to work with their internal resources and the systems they have in place to handle such quantities of work.

Not Your Average Installation

From determining the various skill levels of the resources required for each site to ensuring consistency across multiple sites, project management of category 1 technology rollouts is much different than typical tenant fit-outs being performed by a single contractor over a longer period of time.

To determine the level of knowledge required from local resources, PMs need to first identify the level of difficulty for work at each site. The skill level could be either plug-and-play or in-depth knowledge. With plug-and-play projects, equipment configurations and technical corrections are typically made off-site by a centrally located service team that supports the technology rollout. An in-depth knowledge project that requires

all companies should be customer service oriented.

In a multisite technology rollout, PMs will deal with several different customers, and that means different types of personalities. Each customer should be treated as if they are the only one—something that is much easier for typical installations where the customer is often indeed the only one for the duration of the project. Technology rollout companies have a consistent volume of rollouts going on at any given time, and proper attention must be given to each location. It is important to know the rollout run rate and the resources required for all projects while keeping customer service in mind.

Consider a rollout consisting of 50 category 1 deployment per week for two months for 400 sites. The project might start out on track during the ramp-up period in the first two weeks, but then the rollout company acquires additional workload from other customers. It is important to avoid shifting focus and resources to new customers in a way that causes the initial project to suffer. This can cause issues such as getting off

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schedule or experiencing a large number of revisits and no-shows due to overestimating capabilities.

It is important to not trivialize individual sites in a multisite technology rollout—it is easy to look at a single category 1 site and imagine that the job is smaller than it really is. Avoid thoughts such as “It only involves installing 100 feet of cabling and a pre-configured router that can be done in just a few hours.” This would be fine in a perfect world where all projects go smoothly, but that is rarely the case. If you add up the number of sites and the people involved in a high-volume technology rollout, it takes considerable skill to deliver a consistently high level of service, and problems will likely need to be assessed at some of the locations.

Sometimes the PM is the scapegoat for when things go wrong, whether it is the fault of the managing individual or not. Always take the time to improve processes by setting time aside after each rollout to review lessons learned while it is still fresh in your team’s mind.

Education and Commitment is Key

While an educated PM is a benefit on any single technology infrastructure deployment, the role takes on a whole new dimension when dealing with multiple technology rollouts that require increased responsibility, coordination and teamwork. Experienced and knowledgeable individuals that hold BICSI’s Registered Telecommunications

Project Manager (RTPM) credential are especially beneficial to technology rollout companies.

While project management can be considered an art due to the human factor and the ability to use different methodologies, an effectively educated manager provides the foundation. That is why technology rollout companies that employ RTPMs on every project and require this credential for all managers have a better chance of being highly successful. Continuing to learn, read and grow as a professional is crucial to a technology-based business, and in the modern ICT world, people turn to those with technical expertise.

Just as a contractor goes through peaks and valleys for installation projects, so do project management teams. During downtime, committed PMs should be asking the following questions:

- ▶ Am I studying for a credential to make myself more knowledgeable and valuable?
- ▶ Do I take the initiative to support other project teams during slow periods?
- ▶ Am I actively involved in an industry association?
- ▶ Am I looking at ways to improve our processes and methodologies?
- ▶ Can I help educate other colleagues?

Do You Have What it Takes?

In an effort to grow and amass more customers, the desire to acquire a large business deal on a national scale is quite common.

However, having to perform day in and day out on a mass scale at an expanded level is not for everyone. It is one thing to manage an external job with multiple variables, but it is an entirely different process to rework the internal structure of a locally-based company and ensure the resources for the implementation of that company on a national or global scale. Not every integrator has what it takes.

Let's examine a brief scenario involving a PM at a local integration company. Your role in the company is to manage installations and services for a specific VoIP system within a regional tri-state area. You are now tasked with the challenge of a national rollout. There are several options to complete jobs on a larger scale, including:

- ▶ Leverage the manufacturer of the equipment to provide local ICT contractor resources.
- ▶ Contact local contractors to help perform work in various regions.
- ▶ Select local resources from a staffing company that has a database of contactors from which to choose.

While there are options for deploying local resources in a variety of locations, this is just one aspect of a national multisite technology rollout. Consider the following questions to assess your company's capability to expand its services and successfully manage and perform national rollouts:

- ▶ Do you have the internal resources, such as trained PFs,

to handle the workload?

- ▶ Does your company have a process in place to pay local ICT contractors in a timely manner and to quickly resolve invoice disputes?
- ▶ Does your company have a system in place for providing a consistent level of quality at each site?
- ▶ Do you have project management software that works within a proven system or are you using spreadsheets to track each site?
- ▶ Do you have the ability to alter or reconfigure an installation process if something fails or changes are required quickly?

- ▶ Do you have methodologies in place to deal with contractors not showing up to a site?
- ▶ Do you have processes in place to ensure that the contracted resources are professional and have quality company standards, and processes to handle when they do not?

The processes and methodologies suggested in these questions need to be already integrated into a company's existing culture to manage large national scale projects—delving into a national technology rollout is not something that a company or PM can quickly or



DEMANDING REQUIREMENTS?



DEMANDING CUSTOMERS?



DEMAND CONCERT!



haphazardly start providing. PMs need to recognize their individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as the ability of the company to support these types of projects.

When a company is given the opportunity to work on a single site or multiple local sites, it provides the opportunity to prove the company's capabilities to their customer and their value to the community at large. However, when a local company is asked to handle a national job based on previous local performance but does not have the systems, processes and/or staff to handle the job, the company's and the customer's reputations are at risk. When presented with these opportunities, many companies are quick to state that they can handle the job only to realize that they lack the management, resources, methodologies, culture and capital to do so. A better response for those unequipped to project manage multisite technology rollouts would be to thank the customer for the opportunity but let them know that the company does not have the resources and systems to handle the national scope. Better yet would be to also recommend a firm that is equipped to handle the scope and partner with them in their geographical area. Ultimately, the customer will appreciate the honesty rather than a failed attempt.

Closing Thoughts

Understanding the differences in project managing multisite technology rollouts is the first step to creating systems that complete these jobs effectively. In addition, knowing what to watch out for when assembling a team of educated, committed RTPMs can go a long way in ensuring the overall success of a technology rollout company.

Many companies lack the ability to expand to support the needs of challenging national deployments. When it comes to project management, the ability to handle large projects with ease is crucial, and systems must be in place to support PMs. Companies that are able to provide a personal touch along with effectively managing local resources on a national level are rare but entirely possible with the right network and internal structure in place. ◀



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96.8%



Tech-On-Time



99.7%

Done Right The First Time

94.3%



High or Very High Customer Satisfaction Rating



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"For too long our industry has hidden behind customers' low expectations of installation performance. Concert was founded on the premise that there is **absolutely** a way to deliver a high-quality customer installation experience – even at massive volumes.

It's time that technology rollout companies stopped blaming poor installation performance on the Field Technicians and instead ask themselves 'what are we doing to put front-line Field Technicians in a position to deliver a great installation experience?

You see our numbers, I challenge the industry as a whole to provide the same level of transparency. It's long past time for customers to be able to make informed purchasing decisions based on real data, not marketing promises."

-Dennis Mazaris, President & CEO, Concert Technologies

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