

# OPERATIONS MANAGERS vs PROJECT MANAGERS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY

## INTRODUCTION

“Good communications and the ability to motivate, lead, and enjoy working with a diverse group of people are the foundation of excellence in project management,” according to Stephen Seay, author of the Project Steps blog and an experienced project manager for more than 20 years.

## PROBLEM

The success of any project lies heavily on the shoulders of the project manager expected to deliver the project according to scope, within budget, and on time. These things depend heavily upon the behavior of the project manager—not on their intentions or personality, but specifically on what they accomplish throughout the lifecycle of the project.

In the gold and platinum mining industry, operations managers often become the default project manager due to their familiarity with the environment. However, due to project overruns, it seemed like they were not ideally suited to the task, but no specific root cause or symptom could be found.

## WHY SHADOWMATCH?

Shadowmatch has the ability accurately determine the fundamental habits and behaviors that make individuals successful in specific roles. Although many of the other attributes of individuals in different roles often seem like they would be beneficial, all of these attributes (such as skills, personality, experience) are irrelevant if the individual does not have the correct behavioral strengths.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Shadowmatch pinpointed the habits of five top performing operations managers within the gold and platinum mining industry into one combined benchmark. In addition, the habits of seven successful project managers within the same gold and platinum mines were mapped via Shadowmatch and also portrayed as a benchmark.

Once identified, the behaviors of each benchmark were compared in order to determine which behavioral attributes distinguished project managers from operations managers.

## RESULTS

Seven of the 25 habits measured by Shadowmatch have shown a 10% or higher difference between the two combined benchmarks. Habits that had differences of less than 10% were either insignificant or

assumed to be present only when individuals experienced high levels of stress.

The project managers tended to participate actively in changing situations and were inclined toward change, if necessary, whereas the operations managers were more reluctant to change. The project managers dealt better with change and preferred working in dynamic environments. There was a 28% difference between the groups in respect to their overall propensity to handle change.

The project managers showed a 33% higher propensity toward teamwork compared to that of the operations managers. The operations managers tended to prefer working alone and preferred individual tasks to team tasks.

The project managers showed a 28% higher preference toward finding new and creative ways to perform tasks or to identify new processes, whereas the operations managers in the same environment preferred to stay with the way things were done in the past, rather than looking at innovative ways to approach tasks and processes. The operations managers tended to consider innovation a time waster.

The project managers had a 33% higher propensity to find the correct solution to a problem. However, it took the project managers longer to resolve the conceptual problems. This critical difference indicated that it was of more importance for the project managers to solve problems in their entirety, even if it took more time to do so. The operations managers were more time-efficient but less successful in resolving problems.

The habit of successfully applying conceptual ability and the habit of simplifying are “habit pairs.” Both of these attributes were more embedded habits in the behavior of the project managers. Altruism and conflict handling forms another habit pair, because they combine to form a single behavioral preference. The project managers displayed a 13% stronger tendency in their willingness to help others without expecting anything in return. They also showed a 17% stronger trait in their ability to handle conflict between people in a constructive way as compared to the operations managers. When it came to more people-intensive tasks, the project managers showed stronger developed habits in this area.

Shadowmatch has the ability to create a critical profile of a benchmark group. The critical profile consists of the five strongest habits portrayed by the group. The critical profiles of these two groups consist predominantly of the same attributes, but in a different ranking order (meaning the two groups prioritize their behavior differently – see Fig. 2).

Only one habit between the two groups was very different: Operations managers displayed discipline as a critical attribute (e.g., they were comfortable working in a highly disciplined environment where structure and timeframes were imperative), but project managers showed “to simplify” as a critical habit (e.g., they automatically made complicated concepts easier to understand and enjoyed simplifying and resolving problems). The scores in the critical profile of the project managers were higher throughout. This meant that their embedded habits were stronger overall.

The two groups did not display significant differences in attitude. Both groups were predominantly participative and unaggressive in their approach toward life and work. Both of the groups became more aggressive when placed in situations where they experienced high levels of stress.

### CONCLUSION

There are significant differences in the behavior of successful project managers and operations managers in the mining environment. Project managers have the habit of adapting to change, are team players, and are willing to help others and handle conflict as part of their everyday job. If the operations managers were to handle project teams, the project deadline and budget could be impacted by increased conflict and tension between the team members because they tend to be less adaptive to change, more individually inclined, less positive toward others, and less effective in handling conflict situations.