

Project Management Series

SPOTLIGHT ON THE OIL AND GAS SECTOR



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Education: Directors Education Program (Institute of Corporate Directors, 2020), B. Comm. (Co-op.) (Memorial University, 2001)

Experience: Karen is responsible for the continued success and growth of Atlantic XL and for the delivery of innovative and cost-effective solutions and services to clients in the oil and gas industry in North and South America. Prior to this, she acted as the business manager and business operations lead at Atlantic XL. Karen also has experience working as an account director with m5 Marketing, Atlantic Canada's largest ad agency. In total, Karen has spent 16 years working in the oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. Currently, she serves on several boards including as chair of the Newfoundland and Labrador Oil and Gas Industries Association (NOIA).



KAREN WINSOR

How have your roles changed over time with respect to project management?

In the beginning, I tried to soak up as much information as I could. I would meet with all the project teams to try to best understand the processes, issues and complexities that they had so that I could do my job better. If I did not understand their issues, then I could not explain what was going on to the client. I had to deal with different departments to understand what their roles were within the project and what we needed to do to get the job done.

Throughout the years, my role has changed to providing more of an oversight role of multiple projects. I have taken all of my experiences managing projects and tried to incorporate them into my current role. Continuous improvement and lessons learned are important. Things are always changing, and you must try to stay on top of it. Using the information that is around you and trying to make the best decisions that you can in the situation you are in to continue to progress and move forward is so important. As a project manager, you constantly have to be evolving and moving forward.

How does project management relate to your current role?

When you have project management skills, they never leave you. So even though I am not a project manager as much anymore, I almost treat the organization with a project

LET'S TALK ABOUT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Tell me how you first got involved with project management. What was your first impression?

When I finished the B. Comm. (Co-op.) program I backpacked across Canada by myself and then I joined Atlantic XL. Atlantic XL had just started as a company; I think I was employee number two. I first started as the business operations co-ordinator, which pretty much included everything that was not technical. If it was not engineering, it was mine.

From a project management perspective, we had two projects with significant scopes of work. I was essentially project managing my boss, who did all the engineering work. It was a career defining time. I had to be disciplined and organized to ensure that we stayed on track. I spent seven years doing that and it was a good introduction to the oil and gas industry.

management approach. I list all the things that are on my plate for the day, whatever they may be, and what is the beginning, the middle and the end of each of them. I take that same mindset and funnel it up through everything that I am doing.

What are your favourite parts of your job? Which areas are the most challenging?

My favourite parts of my current role are the diversity of the things that I get to do. Recently it was an acquisition, and I think that these two companies coming together is going to do great things, which is exciting. Some days I am dealing with marketing or finance or project management from an internal perspective. I may also be involved with customer relations from a business development perspective and letting people know what we're doing now that we're partnering with this other company. I also really enjoy the work I do on the NOIA board, the Janeway Foundation board and the Bull Arm board. They allow me different perspectives.

The most challenging thing is trying to foresee the issues and get ahead of them before they become significant, and my crystal ball does not always work that well. You have mixed success on that because there are some things, like Covid-19, that you will never forecast and then there are other things that you can see coming and you can make a change and dodge and weave.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected how you do your job?

The pandemic has hugely impacted us because much of our work was run offshore and much of that came to a grinding halt. We managed it very much like a project trying to keep employees engaged and keep clients happy while trying to work from home. It was, and remains, tough.

Do you have any advice for new project managers?

I have managed projects with Atlantic XL and with m5 in the millions of dollars. Every project has its successes and its challenges. I think early and often touchpoints with the client are key. You don't want to only make contact when something has gone awry! The soft skills get honed by having this communication.

FOCUS ON THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

What are your thoughts on project management in the oil and gas sector?

Project management is very well defined in the oil and gas sector and very well structured. Whether you are a big company with lots of different project management tools or a small company, the same principles apply.

There will be a kickoff at which point you have to clearly set out the plan and show the client that you are ready. When you are dealing with operators, they expect to know the schedule, who is managing cost and that everything is very closely monitored and structured. You are often dealing with large contracts so you are constantly checking in with your client, sending them cost reports and making it clear where the project is from a cost, schedule and product perspective while making sure that you have met or exceeded their expectations.

“Project management in the oil and gas industry is fast-paced, constantly changing and very exciting! You could be doing one thing one day and the next day will be very different. And even if your career path changes in the future, project management skills will set you up for success in every area.”

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