# Management

MATRIX

The Concept in Brief

Introduction

As with any philosophy, management or otherwise, specific definitions are difficult to find. And even when a "common" definition is agreed upon, the interpretation of how it is to be implemented often varies widely. That being said, here I am trying to simplify the concept of a matrix organization or matrix management. Some of what I say in this document is obviously open to discussion. I have however tried to distill this down to the very basic concepts that would be found in any description.

I have taken the liberty of using the concept of "Weak Matrix Organization" and "Strong Matrix Organization' from The Project Management Institute's "*Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)*". This approach draws some distinctions between how organizations are organized and how matrix management can work.

The Standard Organization

The "standard" organization (non-matrixed) with which most of us are familiar, is depicted in Figure 1. It is comprised of Functional Managers reporting to Executive Management. Each Functional Manager has a staff reporting to him/her. In this scenario, projects are assigned to the staff within a functional area with the Project Manager coming from the same area. Communication in this type of organization is essentially vertical, through the "chain of command". Consequently, if assistance is required from someone in another functional area, it is usually necessary to follow a less than direct path to obtain the help. This problem is one of the reasons that matrix management came into being.

Figure 1 - Standard Organization
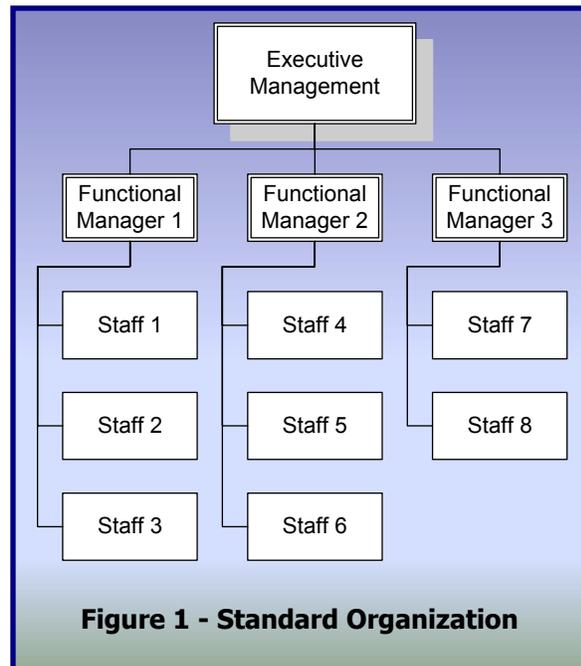
Matrix Organizations

For our purposes we will look at two types of matrix organizations, "weak" and "strong". Physically, a matrix organization looks very much like a "standard" organization. The difference is how projects are assigned, the increased accountability expected from the project manager and the project team, and how the lines of communication flow. Like the "standard" organization, there are vertical lines of communication; but unlike the "standard" organization, communication flows horizontally as well.
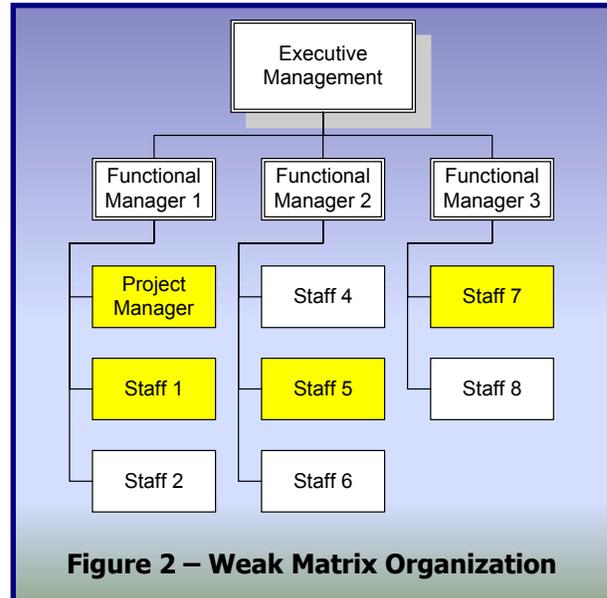
The Weak Matrix Organization

The "weak" matrix organization, depicted in Figure 2, physically looks just like the "standard" organization. The difference is the team members (in yellow) cross functional boundaries, with the project manager coming from one of the functional areas. This serves two purposes:

> ➢ Engaging other areas with a stake in the project.
> ➢ Enabling horizontal communication, that is, across functional areas.

So what makes this a "weak" organizational structure? The project manager, in reporting to a functional manager, may be presented with a different agenda from the functional manager in the chain of command. Depending on the nature of the functional manager, this situation could give that manager an unfair advantage.

Figure 2 – Weak Matrix Organization

The Strong Matrix Organization

The "strong" matrix, depicted in Figure 3, has the same advantages as the "weak" matrix over the "standard" organization. However, the "strong" matrix adds a single area where project managers report. In this configuration, the project manager is less likely to be unduly influenced by one of the functional managers.

Summary

There are many other things to consider when implementing a matrix organization or any other philosophy. Be sure to understand what problems you are trying to solve. Establish metrics and revisit them often to insure you are attaining your goals, or to determine if your goals have changed. Insure there is a business need for everything that is done. And lastly, and most importantly, Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.

Figure 3 – Strong Matrix Organization