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Unlocking Potential: The Impact of Application and Database Access on IT Project Management Efficiency and Effectiveness.

Vaijinath Susuruth Narayana Saker

IT Project Manager – Inrika Inc

https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0954-5043

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Abstract:

This white paper delves into the challenges faced by IT Project Managers (IT PMs) due to restricted application and database access within organizations. Predominantly operating in an application-driven environment, IT PMs play a crucial role in aligning IT projects with organizational objectives and stakeholder expectations. However, the prevalent "Need to Know" policy in many organizations hinders IT PMs from gaining comprehensive insights into the projects they oversee. Such limitations not only pertain to application enhancements but also extend to backend projects like data migration and API enhancements. Restricted access can impede effective communication with technical teams, influence estimation accuracy, alter escalation strategies, and affect stakeholder interaction and end-user understanding. By investigating real-world scenarios, this paper seeks to understand the implications of these restrictions, propose mitigation strategies, and recommend solutions to optimize IT Project Management practices. The overarching aim is to enrich the discourse on improving IT PMs' efficiency and efficacy by reassessing access policies.

Introduction:

Information Technology (IT) projects predominantly operate within an application-driven framework. A vast majority of these projects necessitate the continual enhancement of applications to align with evolving business needs. The role of an IT Project Manager (IT PM) is paramount in steering the project's trajectory, ensuring its alignment with organizational objectives and stakeholder expectations.

The IT PM shoulders the responsibility of securing funds for the project while maintaining a stringent control over costs. A critical aspect of their role involves ensuring timely completion of tasks within allocated hours and proactively addressing potential deviations. There are instances where the IT PM must scrutinize the task at hand and inquire about the intricacies involved. For instance, questions may arise such as, "Why is a task focused solely on display text-based front-end changes estimated to consume 100 hours?" or "Why is the addition of a seemingly simple new dropdown option projected to take 80 hours to test?"

However, IT PMs frequently encounter a significant challenge – the stringent "Need to Know" policy prevalent in many organizations. This policy often restricts IT PMs from gaining access to the application under development or enhancement, thereby limiting their understanding of the ongoing enhancements and potential challenges. This restriction poses a notable barrier to IT PMs, inhibiting their ability to comprehensively grasp the intricacies of the application enhancements and consequently, manage the project effectively.

Furthermore, this challenge is not exclusive to projects involving application enhancements but also extends to backend projects such as data migration, API enhancement, batch, and orchestration process-based projects. While these projects may not directly involve application interfacing, they are closely tied to database interactions. Similar restrictions on application and database access persist in these scenarios, further amplifying the challenges faced by IT PMs in various organizational settings.

Given the prevalence and impact of this issue, this white paper aims to meticulously probe and investigate this pervasive problem. Through a thorough examination of real-world scenarios, case studies, and expert insights, we seek to unravel the complexities surrounding restricted application access for IT PMs. Our objective is to shed light on the implications of such restrictions, explore potential strategies to mitigate the associated challenges, and ultimately, propose viable solutions to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of IT Project Management.

In doing so, we endeavor to foster a deeper understanding of the pivotal role of IT PMs, the challenges they encounter in navigating access restrictions, and the potential pathways to fortifying their ability to manage projects adeptly. By delving into the multifaceted aspects of this issue, we aim to facilitate informed discussions, encourage organizational reassessment of access policies, and contribute to the ongoing discourse on optimizing IT Project Management practices.

Project Manager having access to the Application and the Database will have an impact on the following:-

Interaction with the Technical Team: Access enables the Project Manager to communicate more effectively with the technical team by providing insights into the application's functionalities and database structure.

Quality of the Estimate: Direct access allows the Project Manager to assess the accuracy and quality of time and resource estimates more effectively.

Escalation Approach: Understanding the intricacies of the application and database can influence how and when the Project Manager escalates issues.

Handling Multiple Business Stakeholders: Access to the application and database can enhance the Project Manager's ability to manage expectations and communicate with various business stakeholders.

Understanding End User Pain Points: With firsthand knowledge of the application, the Project Manager can better comprehend the challenges faced by the end-users**.**

Project Oversight through Database Accessibility: Access to the database provides an additional layer of oversight, allowing the Project Manager to monitor project progress and identify potential issues more efficiently.

Project Manager's Interaction with the Technical Team:

In the complex and varied landscape of Information Technology, several distinct types of projects emerge, including Sunrise Projects, Enhancement Projects, Sunset Projects, Cloud Migration Projects, and Accessibility Projects. Each category presents its unique challenges and specific demands, requiring careful and adept management to ascertain the fulfillment of all scoped items within the stipulated budget and timeframe.

Central to navigating the multifarious challenges intrinsic to these projects is the IT Project Manager. This pivotal role is multifunctional, acting as a crucial interface ensuring coherent communication between the Technical Lead and the Product Team. This becomes particularly essential when discrepancies between project expectations and realities surface, exemplified by scenarios where the construction of two modules is anticipated within a constrained three-month timeline, contrary to an initial six-month estimate.

In such scenarios, the depth of the IT Project Manager's understanding of the Technical Lead's communications is of utmost importance. However, this understanding risks being substantially diluted if the IT Project Manager is devoid of application and database access. The absence of such access could result in a diminished resonance of the message, as opposed to scenarios where the IT Project Manager can directly delve into the application under development

or enhancement. This direct insight is pivotal for accurately assessing the volume of work demanded from the Technical Team.

Being endowed with application access significantly augments the IT Project Manager's capacity to precisely assess the workload associated with the development of additional modules. In contrast, a lack of such access precipitates difficulties in comprehending the nuanced demands of module development. This contrast in comprehension and insight highlights the critical necessity of application and database access for IT Project Managers, which is instrumental in aligning project outcomes with organizational objectives and ensuring optimal project execution.

Project Manager figuring out the quality of the estimate:

Consider another scenario: the Technical team provides an inflated estimate for a seemingly straightforward user story. More specifically, they assign five story points to a task that appears to warrant only one. In such instances, the role of the IT Project Manager extends beyond mere oversight—it demands keen observation to identify these discrepancies, followed by a thorough investigation and inquiry into the rationale behind the disproportionate allocation of story points, particularly for tasks as simple as the implementation of a radio button and display text.

Having access to the application being developed or enhanced significantly empowers the IT Project Manager in identifying and diagnosing such patterns. The ability to directly interact with and assess the application facilitates a more accurate evaluation of the workload and subsequently enables the IT Project Manager to undertake any necessary course corrections promptly. This immediate access to the application serves as a crucial tool for maintaining the integrity of the project's trajectory and ensuring the alignment of the development work with the project's objectives.

Conversely, when the IT Project Manager's "Need to Know" is restricted to the extent that access to the application is denied, identifying and addressing such behaviors or patterns at an early stage becomes considerably challenging. This restriction not only hinders the IT Project Manager's ability to maintain transparency and accountability within the team but also poses a significant risk to the overall success and efficiency of the project.

Through this case, we emphasize the pivotal role of application access in enabling IT Project Managers to effectively identify, investigate, and rectify any inconsistencies in task estimation. This access is indispensable in fostering a culture of accountability and ensuring the accurate alignment of project tasks with organizational objectives, thereby contributing to the project's overall success and efficacy.

The way the Project Manager escalates:

Contemplate another scenario, where the Business Team presents conflicting requirements. Upon addressing these inconsistencies, it becomes apparent that the Business Team is struggling to comprehend the nature of their missteps. To delve deeper, imagine a scenario involving the

development or enhancement of a Banking application. The Business Team initially communicates a need for a mechanism to capture all overdraft accounts for the day. However, during User Acceptance Testing, they erroneously claim to have also required a mechanism for accounts with uninvested cash— a specification they had genuinely overlooked in their initial request.

This discrepancy necessitates escalation to the IT Project Manager, who, in turn, must communicate this issue to the management. In scenarios where the IT Project Manager possesses access to the application, they can comprehend the extent and intricacy of the problem more thoroughly. Developing a mechanism to capture overdraft accounts is a complex task, necessitating the creation of three interconnected pages within the application, each imbued with various business logics. Without direct reference to the application, gauging the magnitude of this issue is inherently challenging.

Even in situations where the IT Project Manager lacks application access, while they will still escalate the matter, the articulation of the escalation may lack the depth and detail that comes from a comprehensive understanding of the conflicting requirements presented by the Business Team. Having application access equips the IT Project Manager with the insight to present a more effective and detailed representation of the situation, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and resolution at the management level. This access underscores its indispensable role in managing and resolving conflicting requirements and ensuring the alignment of the project's objectives with the team's capabilities and the organization's goals.

The Project Manager handling multiple Business stakeholders:

Consider another illustrative scenario wherein the IT Project Manager is steering an accessibility project. Within this context, a specific page in an application is not fully accessible to end-users with special needs, necessitating adherence to a set of Accessibility Nonfunctional Requirements for the successful completion of the project.

Throughout the progression of such projects, several potential issues may arise:

Multiple Stakeholders with Conflicting Requirements: There may exist more than one Business entity eager to contribute Accessibility Nonfunctional Requirements, resulting in conflicting demands and complicating the project's execution.

Scope Creep from Business Teams: The Business Team(s) might propose requirements that extend beyond the project's defined scope. For instance, while only front-end or User Interface changes are in scope, the Business Team might attempt to introduce middle-tier or backend requirements.

Technological Limitations: The present Technology stack may be ill-equipped to fulfill the proposed accessibility nonfunctional requirements, presenting further challenges to project fulfillment.

In instances where multiple Business entities present conflicting nonfunctional accessibility requirements, discerning whether the Business Team is adhering to the proper Software Development Lifecycle becomes a formidable challenge for the IT Project Manager. While the Business Analyst or Tech Lead might communicate this incongruity to the IT Project Manager, without the necessary tools and application access, the IT Project Manager may find themselves inadequately equipped to verify the integrity of the requirements provided and ensure best practices are being followed. Access to the application becomes an invaluable asset in navigating these challenges, fostering an environment conducive to effective communication, comprehensive understanding, and successful project realization.

Project Manager understanding the pain points of the Application End Users:

For effective project management, an IT Project Manager must be thoroughly synchronized with the business and its end users. When an IT Project Manager lacks access to the application, a significant barrier arises, inhibiting their ability to comprehend the application's functionality and the challenges faced by the end users. This limitation restricts the IT Project Manager's insight into the users' experiences and hampers their capability to deliver maximum value to the Business.

Contrastingly, when IT Project Managers are granted access to the application, they gain at least a foundational understanding of the application's process flows and the pain points of the end users. Armed with this knowledge, they are better positioned to manage and support the Business effectively. Without this understanding of the application and the Business's utilization of it, IT Project Managers are left at a disadvantage, struggling to offer the necessary support and value to the Business.

Equipping IT Project Managers with application access not only enriches their understanding of user pain points but also enhances their ability to foster stronger, more productive relationships with the Business. It becomes a pivotal factor in enabling them to align project goals more closely with user needs and Business objectives, thereby contributing to the overall success and value of the IT project.

Project Oversight through Database Accessibility:

In the realm of backend projects focusing on API development for information exchange between varied applications, enabling the IT Project Manager with database access emerges as a strategic imperative. This accessibility offers the manager a granular view of API Payloads, thereby fostering an enriched comprehension of the project's developmental nuances. By diminishing the reliance on status communications from the technical team, the Project Manager attains a heightened level of autonomy and proactive engagement, allowing for the early identification and mitigation of potential impediments and ensuring the project's adherence to its outlined trajectory.

Armed with real-time insights derived from database access, the Project Manager is strategically positioned to optimize the oversight of technical teams, especially in scenarios depicting a slowdown in project completion rates. This elevated perspective facilitates discernment in evaluating the nature of incoming requests, enabling the manager to distinguish between reasonable demands and those that may be deemed excessive from external business stakeholders. Such insight-driven management cultivates a harmonious balance between stakeholder expectations and project realities, fostering a collaborative environment and steering the project towards its overarching objectives.

Solution:

The principle of 'need to know' within an organization is pivotal, but it should not be so restrictive that it impedes the IT Project Manager – the individual accountable for the project – from accessing the very application being developed or enhanced. A balanced approach is essential, wherein the 'need to know' policy accommodates access for both IT Project Managers and Scrum Masters, thereby granting them additional leverage. This adjustment will not only bolster the team's effectiveness but will also enhance the understanding of the project, the requirements of the Business, the needs of the end users, and foster tech-savviness among the managers.

Organizations must exercise a thorough understanding and management of the application's 'need to know' policies in place. It is imperative for higher management to advocate for IT Project Managers to gain access to the applications under development or enhancement. This advocacy is crucial for fostering a comprehensive understanding among the management regarding the nuances of what is being developed. A seamless connection between the development and the project management teams is indispensable, ensuring that no gap exists in the understanding of the project's trajectory.

Without intervention from high-level management, achieving this harmonized understanding and collaboration remains a challenge in most organizations. Facilitating such access will serve as a catalyst for bridging knowledge gaps, promoting a more coherent and unified approach to project development, and ensuring that the management is well-informed and aligned with the project's objectives and progress. This alignment is instrumental in driving the project towards success, meeting the business and end-user needs effectively, and fostering a more technologically adept and informed management team.

Conclusion:

This white paper has addressed the vital issue of restricted application access for IT Project Managers within organizations, exploring various scenarios where enhanced access can significantly improve project outcomes. By adopting a balanced 'need to know' policy, organizations can empower IT Project Managers with the necessary tools and insights, enabling

them to better understand and support both business and end-user needs. High-level management intervention is crucial to bridging the knowledge gap and fostering a harmonious, informed, and effective project development environment. Through such initiatives, organizations can ensure project success, enhance team efficacy, and ultimately deliver maximum value to the end-users.

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