Project Managers are from Saturn and Program Managers are from Jupiter

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Abstract

A collision between planets Saturn and Jupiter inspired the Egyptian, Norse, Greek, and Roman mythology story of Saturn and Jupiter. Saturn is the father of Jupiter and, although he is originally good, driven by a prophesy that says he will be overthrown by one of his children, he decides to eat his newborn children. Baby Jupiter is saved by his mother; when he reaches adulthood he forces his father to release the children he had swallowed and banishes him to the outer reaches of the world. In this paper, we will use the mythological and astrological personality traits of the two protagonists of this legend as an analogy of project and program management.

We will analyze four areas that our experience and research have identified as crucial differences between program and project managers. We have identified them as LASA (Leadership, Approach, Strategy, and Attitude). Using the results of a previous survey in the U.S., we discuss how the role of project managers and program managers should be different in each of these areas. We involved the participants by asking them to complete a survey and participate in the discussion.

LASA: Four key characteristics:

1- Leadership: Facilitating leadership as opposed to directing leadership; stimulating discussions especially around stakeholder engagement, expectations, and acceptance of program objectives.

2- Approach: Systems view vs. performance view, stimulating discussions around governance approaches, learning, performance, and decision-making in a complex environment.

3- Strategy: Strategic focus instead of product focus, which would address the difference between product and benefits, interdependencies between benefits and alignment with the strategic goals.

4- Attitude: Tolerance to ambiguity vs. Cartesian Anxiety; the need to be flexible because programs generate turbulence. In programs, changes originate from interfaces with other subsystems of the program and factors external to the program.

Context: Astronomy, Astrology, and Mythology

As planets, Saturn and Jupiter have a similar structure to the sun. If they were not orbiting around the sun, they would be considered stars in their own right. It is believed that these two bodies approached each other closely at one time, causing a stellar explosion with huge consequences for each other’s atmospheres. This led to Saturn being derailed from its orbit. Today, both planets are covered with gases that are in constant motion. Jupiter has at least 14 satellites and several asteroids and comets. Saturn has 10 known satellites. Presently, Jupiter is nearly 330 times more massive than the Earth—Saturn is 80 times larger—this was not always the case. It is believed that both their appearance and respective masses would have been originally similar (Kuiper, 1959).

Folklore and mythology present Saturn (Kronos-Osiris-Odin) and Jupiter (Zeus-Horus-Thor) in constant tension and powerful clashes. It is now accepted that in immemorial times during a close encounter with Jupiter, Saturn became unstable and exploded, becoming a nova, which, after settling down, was only a shadow of its former glory. Saturn was sent to a distant orbit—the binary system was broken up and Jupiter took over the dominant position in the sky. The ancient Egyptian, Norse, Greek, and Romans understood this and saw it as Horus-Thor-Zeus-Jupiter, victorious over his father, Osiris-Odin-Kronos-Saturn forcing him to release the children he earlier had swallowed (the satellites asteroids and comets resulting from the clash) and banishing him to the outer reaches of the sky. In their
eyes it was Horus-Thor-Zeus-Jupiter assuming royal power, leaving Osiris-Odin-Kronos-Saturn to reign over the
kingdom of the dead.

Although program management is probably not destined to dethrone project management, it is obvious that in the
last 5-10 years, program management has gained a prominent position in project-based organizations and that its
situation is enabling project management to become a discipline recognized at strategic and organizational level.
Program management is now recognised by many authors as the link between project and strategy and as such is
assuming a dominant role both in organizational structure and organizational maturity.

“Astrologically, Saturn is associated with the principles of limitation, restrictions, practicality and
reality, crystallizing and structures. Saturn governs ambition, career, authority and hierarchy, and conforming social
structures. It concerns a person's sense of duty, discipline and responsibility, and their physical and emotional
endurance during hardships. Saturn is also considered to represent the part of a person concerned with long-term
planning. Whereas Jupiter is associated with the principles of growth, expansion, prosperity and good fortune; and a
person's inner sense of justice and morality and their ideals and higher goals. Jupiter governs long distance and
foreign travel, higher education, religion and the law. It is also associated with the urge for freedom and exploration,
humanitarian and protecting roles. In Chinese astrology, Saturn is patient, hard-working and reliable. Jupiter is
warm, generous and co-operative” (Wikipedia, 2009).

**Exploration: Launching the Discussion**

Personality traits generally associated with Jupiter are: growth, expansion, synthesis, harmony, human networking,
group relations, new sociological patterns, transformations in human consciousness, idealism, inner sense of justice
and morality, ideals, and higher goals, as well as teaching and sharing.

Personality traits generally associated with Saturn are: economy of resources, gatekeeping, conscious choice, justice,
creation of structural patterns, focus on cause and effect relationship, objectivity, control, rigid enforcement of the
law, and structuring of ideas.

Are those traits representative of program and project managers? How can they be related to leadership, approach,
strategy, and attitude?

Try to draw parallels between both the mythological, astrological, and the astronomical background of Jupiter and
Saturn to demonstrate the difference between the competencies expected from project and program managers.

**Leadership**: Saturn was known as an authoritative father…not unwilling to eat his own children to achieve its ends.
He had killed his father to gain sole power. Jupiter was known as a god with a lot of power, but that was sharing the
Olympus with a number of other gods who could and had challenged him on many occasions.

**Approach**: Saturn was focused on results and eventually became the Roman god of agriculture, justice, and
strength. He was focused on control; in Greek mythology, he was the one quizzing the dead to see if they could
enter Hades. Jupiter had a broader view of things, sharing power with his brothers and sisters and not opposite to
forays in the human world where he found, as well as the other gods, lovers and sired many children.

**Strategy**: Saturn saw very clear means to his ends. In ancient Rome he is associated with the calendar, whereas for
Jupiter ultimate benefits could be achieved through many means, sometimes contradictory.

**Attitude**: Saturn wanted things to be clear and well under control. Jupiter was willing to accept a lot of ambiguity to
achieve its ultimate objectives.

**Survey Results and Analysis**

At the PMI Global Congress North America, we surveyed a mixed group of 88 project and program managers and
asked them to assign a number of recognized Jupiter and Saturn personality traits to either project or program
managers. Of these 88 questionnaires, 19 were rejected for various reasons, leaving 69 valid answers. The survey
question was asked as follows: “Associate elements of the two lists in the first boxes with headings in the boxes
below.”
Saturn people favor:  | Jupiter people favor:
---|---
S1. limitation, restrictions, boundaries | J1. growth, expansion
S2. discipline and responsibility | J2. urge for freedom and exploration
S3. practicality and reality | J3. ideals and higher goals
S4. crystallizing and structures | J4. transformations consciousness, idealism
S5. sense of duty, justice | J5. humanitarian and protecting roles
S6. ambition, career | J6. prosperity and good fortune
S7. conforming social structures | J7. human networking, group relations
S8. patient, hard-working and reliable | J8. warm, generous and co-operative
S9. conscious choice, long-term planning | J9. intuition, emergent planning
S10. gate keeping, objectivity, control | J10. harmony, but willing to accept ambiguity
S11. economy of resources | J11. whatever it takes to achieve goal
S12. analysis, cause and effect relationship | J12. synthesis, adaptability
S13. structuring of ideas | J13. teaching and sharing
S14. respect of authority and hierarchy | J14. new sociological patterns
S15. rigid enforcement of the law | J15. inner sense of justice and morality

Participants were asked to link each of these personality 30 traits to either program or program managers in each of the four key characteristics (LASA).

The first obvious result is that participants in the study overwhelmingly associate project managers with Saturnian personality (87%) and Jupiter personality traits with program managers (84%).

The key project manager characteristic that has been attributed the most personality traits is the approach, which in the questionnaire was associated to governance. Respondents associate approach with “gate keeping, objectivity, control” (14% of responses), “rigid enforcement of the law” (11%) and “limitation, restrictions, boundaries” (10%). Collectively, these three traits, which are all associated with control count for more than one third (35%) of the traits associated to the project manager’s approach and 10% of the overall traits associated with project managers. These results are hardly surprising as project management is mostly associated with the creation and respect of a baseline. Leadership is the second most important characteristic in term of responses at 25%, but the other two come close by at 22% (attitude) and 21% (strategy). Among those, “respect of authority and hierarchy,” “patient, hard-working, and reliable,” and “conscious choice, long-term planning” are the dominant traits of character.

Overall, across the four key characteristics, respondents have spread Saturnian personality traits quite evenly for project managers with a variation range only from 6.8% to 4.2%. The dominant traits are “discipline and responsibility,” “limitation, restrictions, boundaries,” “sense of duty, justice,” and “patient, hard-working and reliable”—all between 6.6 and 6.8%. These all are consistent with the concept of project management as a clearly scoped endeavour supported by a strong baseline.

Jupiter personality traits count for only 13% of project managers’ attributions, varying between 0.1% and 2.1% of attributions. The dominant traits are: “whatever it takes to achieve goal,” which is almost double of the next one with 2.1% of responses, followed by “intuition, emergent planning” (1.3%) and “human networking, group relations” (1.2%). Interestingly “whatever it takes to achieve goal” is the lowest among the Jupiterian characteristics of program managers, so there seems to a clear understanding among the respondents that this is more of a project management trait. The lowest among the Saturn traits of project managers are “conscious choice, long-term planning” and “crystallizing and structuring” at 4.5% and 4.2%, which is consistent with a well-defined relatively short- or medium-term endeavour. “Conscious choice, long-term planning” and “structuring of ideas” are the highest
among the Saturnian traits of program managers respectively at 2.1% and 1.7%. This seems logical in regards of the program managers’ role, which involves the translation of high-level strategic objectives into defined project deliverables and operational improvements and the structuring of complex situations.

The key characteristic that is identified as dominant for program managers is **leadership** with 29% of the trait attributions; it is closely followed by **approach** at 25% and **strategy** and **attitude** both at 23%. Dominant traits of leadership in program manager have been identified by respondents as: “human networking, group relations,” which is the same as that of project managers, “humanitarian and protecting roles” and “teaching and sharing.” All those traits relate to humanitarian qualities, which is far from the project managers’ dominant characteristics of authority and hierarchy in this area. The second overall characteristic is **approach**, which is first if we consider only the Jupiter traits, the dominant trait in this area is “inner sense of justice and morality,” followed by “harmony, but willing to accept ambiguity.” “Ideals and higher goals” is the dominant overall trait for program managers, followed closely by “growth expansion” and “urge for freedom and exploration.”

Saturn personality traits most associated with program managers are “conscious choice, long-term planning” and “structuring of ideas,” which respectively count for 13% and 10.6% of program managers’ Saturnian traits. Both these traits are consistent with the role of the program manager, which consists of structuring strategic ideas and reconciling stakeholders’ needs to deliver capability improvements that will create business benefits. One result that surprised us was that among the lowest scores on Jupiter traits for program managers were “intuition, emergent planning” and “new sociological patterns.” We could reasonable assume that, for many of the respondents, the definition of new sociological patterns may not have been clear as it is more of a behavioural concept. On the other hand, we were expecting intuition and emergent planning to be much higher up on the scale as the work of program managers is characterised by continuous adjustments. This could be explained by the fact that the participants had an American bias towards program management, where programs are more closely defined, or the fact that most of the audience was composed of project managers.

![Saturn Traits](image1.png) ![Jupiter Traits](image2.png)

**Project Managers**

**Program Managers**

**Conclusions**

In general, we can conclude that this survey and paper supports the argument that project managers are from Saturn and program managers are from Jupiter. It also supports current definitions of project management as a time limited endeavour where relationship between means and ends is well defined and program management as a benefits-based interactive negotiated process. The survey also clarified that leadership, which was identified as the management of stakeholders in the questionnaire, and approach, which was associated with governance, are the two areas that respondents have found dominate the personality of project and program managers. For program managers leadership is associated with a humanistic characteristic and approach is related to an internal sense of discipline. For project managers, leadership is synonymous with respect of authority and approach is associated with respect of authority and of external controls. This demonstrates that even if they are the dominant characteristics in both disciplines, their meaning is quite different in the program and project management context.

We will conclude with a particularly relevant thought that one of the participants made during the presentation of this topic in Orlando, FL. Marcos Santos Abreu from Brazil mentioned that project managers are more worried about how the environment is going to affect their project, whereas program managers are concerned about how their program will affect their environment.
References
