

Project Tango: Building a team, laying ground rules and managing communications with stakeholders

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Abstract

Project management is a mix of both science and art. It is a science because project managers need to estimate and manage time and cost. It is an art because they should ensure that all team members are in sync, while stakeholders are efficiently projecting the point across without communication gaps. It has been long recognised that developing nontechnical (i.e. 'soft') skills of project managers and team members plays a critical role in the success of any project regardless of industry. Such skills reflect the leadership skills of project managers, which typically fall under the knowledge areas of project resource management, project communications management and project stakeholder management. Even though there are many strategies for improving soft skills in a project team, the challenges in implementing these strategies are not often discussed. Recognition of the significance of these aspects is not novel, yet most project management studies are focused on the technical (i.e. 'hard') skills of project management. This teaching case aims to bridge this gap by inviting students to reflect on how soft skills can make a difference throughout the project lifecycle. The case is about a mobile telecommunication network upgrade project in New Zealand. Despite being completed on time, on budget and at the agreed scope, the project was never implemented due to the acquisition of the client by a larger telecommunications company, which had other strategic priorities. The focus of the teaching case is on leadership skills and communication management in projects.

Keywords

Team building, ground rules, communication management, project closure, leadership, stakeholder engagement

Introduction

On a balmy spring evening in Auckland, Joe took his dog Rocky for his evening walk as the sun began to set over the Macleans Park coastal range. Earlier on that day, he had been informed that he would join an exciting initiative for a big player in the New Zealand telecommunications market. He was thinking about the exciting opportunity ahead of him. Joe, a seasoned project manager, anticipated the two-fold effect that this project would have on his career. First, the upcoming project constituted a platform for him to contribute his vast knowledge and experience to a significant initiative. Second, his involvement in this project represented an excellent opportunity to hone his project management skills further. Joe reflected on the problems that had been raised during the implementation of similar projects – albeit of smaller scale – such as the implementation of high-speed Internet access in rural areas. He remembered

the lessons learned and knew they could be of invaluable help in this upcoming project.

An exciting initiative

Kommunika is a multinational telecommunications and networking solutions provider company. The company, headquartered in Oslo, Norway, was founded in 1982. Kommunika offers software, infrastructure and services in information and communication technology for both land-line and mobile telephone services, broadband and IP

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networking equipment, among other services. Kommunika employs around 54,000 people in over 60 countries, including New Zealand.

In early 2012, Telefon – a major telco in the New Zealand market, subsidiary of an Australian conglomerate – went ahead with an ambitious initiative: the upgrade of its third-generation (3G) to a fourth-generation (4G) mobile network. Telefon launched its 3G network in 2007. At that time, it represented a considerable leap in terms of performance from its predecessor, the 2G network. While the 2G network, commercially launched in the 1990s, was well suited for the transmission of information through voice calls, mobile data services were limited to SMS text. The 3G network technology, developed in the early 2000s, made possible transferring information through data such as images and video. It offered users speeds between 20 and 50 megabits per second (Mbps) depending on multiple factors such as the distance from a network tower or the radio power inside the mobile phone.

Telefon wanted to capitalise on 4G capabilities and offer the best technology available to allow its customers to do whatever they needed to do anywhere. The 4G network is up to 10 times faster than 3G with speeds of up to 450 Mbps. For instance, downloading a 50 MB store app using a 3G network may take close to 40 s, this operation can be completed in just over 10 s on a 4G network. While the New Zealand Herald app size is 25.9 MB, many of the most popular apps in New Zealand are over 50 MB – for example, Trademe is 89.5 MB and Air New Zealand is 94 MB. The quality of streaming videos and music using 4G technology was also noticeably better compared with 3G.

Telefon did not want to be left behind in the competitive telecommunications market. The stakes were high for Telefon, so it wanted to partner with a reputable solution provider for the network upgrade project. Among a few well-known competitors, Telefon selected Kommunika as their solution provider. There were very good reasons for this choice. In 2012, Kommunika had just been recognised, for the second year in a row, as one of the top five telecommunication solution providers in the Asia Pacific region. Kommunika's standing as a global leader given by its impeccable record of successful delivery network projects and the reasonable budget cost estimation made the Scandinavian company the natural option for Telefon. Kommunika was in a position to offer a total solution including technology and cell sites tailored to Telefon's requirements. The signing of the agreement between Kommunika and Telefon in October 2011 in Auckland marked the initiation of Project Tango. The budget for this project was within the envelope of NZD 80 million and its estimated completion time was of 12 months.

Building the team

Once Kommunika secured the contract, it started a global search for the person who would serve as programme

director, responsible for overseeing Project Tango. Eventually, Kommunika's Project Management Office (PMO) in Wellington appointed Hans Becker, a communications specialist with experience in the German Air Force. The appointment of Hans as programme director brought a sense of relief to the organisation. He was considered as the right man for this role; he was a hard-nosed, task-oriented, experienced project manager. For Hans, it was not just another project; it was the beginning of a new life in New Zealand. He knew that the success of this project would be instrumental in advancing his career and building a reputation in a new country.

Within 8 weeks after the contract was awarded, the 'mobilisation' stage started. Once appointed as programme director, Hans focused his effort on forming the team of programme managers that would work under his supervision. Except for Joe, who was based in Auckland and had been working for Kommunika since the early 2000s, the other programme managers came from overseas. Some of them had worked with Hans on other projects in Europe. In turn, the appointed programme managers built their teams by recruiting members from other branches of Kommunika around the world. Eventually, it took 6 weeks to form the team and have all the team members in New Zealand.

Hans organised two teams: the business team and the technical team. The former was responsible for working with Telefon on business processes such as a marketing plan to profile customers, product and pricing strategy, governance analysis and legal intercept. The technical team was responsible for managing day-to-day issues and conducting requirement and design analysis. In the technical team, managers were recruited for the Service Layer of the contractual aspects, delivery of telecommunication services; Radio Access Network for radio transmissions, signalling of mobile signals to determine where is the location, sender and receiver; Core Network for network infrastructure of the applications and services (i.e. basic infrastructure of how switches work, the location of network, type of services to be used such as video) and Testing. A programme coordinator was also recruited who could help the programme director and project team with project activities and scheduling, as well as planning meetings. Kommunika's PMO assigned directors to the Tango team based on their expertise shown in Kommunika branches around the world. The managers assigned to Project Tango were Joe Campbell, a network engineer, Peter Clark, radio access network manager with responsibility for radio transmissions, Bill Wang, core network manager, Jack Green, test manager and Sarah Portman, programme coordinator. The project organisation chart is presented in Figure 1.

From day 1, Hans worked hard to achieve the project goals. He led by example and everyone felt obliged to follow his lead. Project Tango was a technically challenging and complex programme. It was not unusual to have team

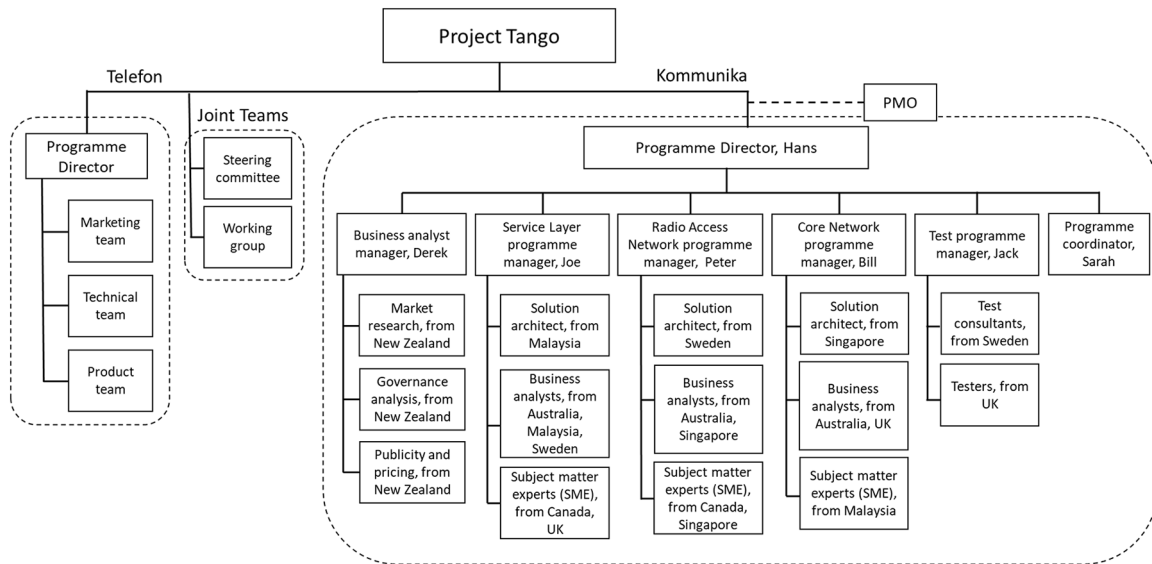


Figure 1. Project organisation chart.

members working up to 60h a week; having team members exchanging communication over weekends was a common occurrence. Peer pressure was enormous and everyone was always thinking of work.

However, tensions started emerging as soon as the project began. For the first few weeks, while the programme managers were still recruiting their team members, the working atmosphere was not the one that Hans envisioned. During a coffee break at the Pantry Café, Bill was talking to Joe and came to a point where he shared his frustrations:

I cannot tolerate this anymore. Peter and I are always competing for the same resources, but he eventually gets them. This situation compromises the quality of the team I need. Peter also keeps telling us how things are done in California. I worked at Kommunika Malaysia for nine years and I did not come all the way from Malaysia to hear someone with less experience than me bragging all the way. I may not have all the qualifications and advanced degrees that he has, but I am good at what I do. I know that! I know well what needs to be done to complete my job tasks. Did you notice in yesterday's meeting that Peter sabotaged all my designs? I cannot stand him and I cannot work with him. I am thinking of resigning from the project. Joe, I will be honest with you. I have the feeling that although Hans is quite strict with all of us, he always sides with Peter. Everyone and each of Peter's requests is promptly met, while mine are simply ignored.

Joe left the Pantry Café thoroughly discouraged and could not imagine what the outcome would be of all these clashes in the early stages of the project. Bill's lament added to Jack's scepticism on the project testing; Joe had earlier found out that Jack was sceptical about whether the project could successfully be tested. The negative vibes from both Bill and Jack were negatively impacting on Joe as well. He thought, 'This is just the beginning'.

A reality check

Nobody doubted Hans's competence. However, he was perceived as an authoritarian manager who did not tolerate even the most trivial slipups. He constantly interrogated the information that was presented to him. He confronted programme managers if he was not fully satisfied with the information they presented. For instance, in the early stages of the project, during one of the weekly Kommunika internal meetings, Hans approached Joe and asked him a question about the integration of a particular application with the core system. Joe did not have the answer as the integration business rules were not yet established; he needed to do a quick check with his team before giving a definite answer to Hans. The question Hans asked was at the work package level; however, Joe and his team were on level 3 of the work breakdown structure. The lack of an immediate answer irritated Hans; he asked everybody to leave the room. Joe recalled, 'He [did] shoot me out and mentioned that I was letting the team down'. Joe described the tense atmosphere at that time: 'Team members were living in fear and simply afraid of sharing the usual bad news with him'.

The turning point for this tense situation happened at one of the regular meetings with the programme managers when Hans expressed his concerns about the slow project progress. He attributed this problem to what he believed was a lack of commitment from the programme managers and their team members. He confronted Bill, 'What is wrong with you?' Bill's dry answer was: 'You are the problem'. This reply shocked Hans. When he asked the same question to all other programme managers sitting at the table, he invariably received the same answer: 'The problem is you'. They reasoned that the lack of qualified staff and the fear of being the bearer of bad news explained the

slow progress; however, they were simply afraid of reporting this problem anticipating an angry reaction.

Hans wanted to be a successful leader on this very important project. However, he realised that his team members were not happy with his leadership style. In addition, he had the feeling that Project Tango as currently staffed was not likely to perform up to standard. Hans as an experienced project manager quickly recognised that his leadership style did not work for this team. He then consulted this issue with a project facilitator. Kommunika PMO outsourced a number of mentors and facilitators to advise the managers or team members when it was required. The facilitator raised the point that complex projects create an extra stress on team members. Therefore, the leader should take an approach that motivates them and assures them that they will deliver the project successfully if they work together as a team. Hans reacted in a positive way. He came to the realistic conclusion that he had to modify the way he interacted with his team. He promised to the team that from now on, he would listen. He immediately asked Sarah to organise a social event the following weekend for everyone to attend with their families. The gathering, the first one of a series of regular ones, gave everyone the opportunity to know each other, including Hans, at a personal level. The team discovered that behind Hans's stern stance was a man who could be remarkably friendly and loyal. The hard taskmaster was able to infuse a sense of personal commitment to the project. No one wanted to disappoint him and the team.

Delays on work packages were no longer considered just problems that could affect project progress; they were taken as a personal fiasco that was letting the team down. The motto for Project Tango was 'Work hard and play hard'. And so was it. Team members discovered the other side of Hans; he was a man committed to getting the job done but at the same time a very social person who could be extremely inspiring to his team. Hans created a shared vision in which completely satisfying the customer was paramount. This had been communicated among the members and created a strategic purpose for the team. It was a source of satisfaction for Hans and other members to deliver the project in a way that could meet customer requirements. Project culture always comes from the top. Hans created an open, transparent and firm culture for Project Tango based on the maxim 'Fix it, not fudge it'.

Hans was then respected as a leader in his team because he led by example. 'You've heard about people being good leaders and you've read about people being good leaders, but [it's different] when you experience [it] and it was on a daily basis with a good leader, it's totally different, you are inspired', Joe said about Hans. Whenever problems happened that had to be reported to Telefon, he took full responsibility: 'I am sorry; I am embarrassed; we should

have done better'. He adopted a team-focused approach. Anytime he sensed the team having difficulties, he asked them to stop their work and go for an all-paid social activity together to have fun. These group social activities helped to ease the stress in the team and encouraged the team members not to fear to ask for help.

Establishing the ground rules

Once the areas of responsibility had been defined, Hans invited everyone to contribute ideas on what would make the team a high performing one. After several rounds of discussion, the team agreed on the values that would guide individual behaviours throughout Project Tango's lifecycle:

1. People drive our success
 - We value, respect and care for each other
 - We are achievement-driven and celebrate success
2. Working together as one
 - We are committed to achieving our shared goals
 - We go beyond our own team and connect across the organisation
3. Acting with openness and integrity
 - We embrace an open world and act in an interdependent way
 - We trust each other
 - We are open, upfront and tell the whole truth
 - We fix it, not fudge it

While these values set the foundations for the team, it was a common practice at Kommunika to present them expressed as tangible actions on how team members would work. Therefore, Hans drafted the project's ways of working that emanated from the agreed values. After a few rounds of revisions, the team endorsed the ways of working shown in Table 1.

Hans made sure that the values and ways of working for Project Tango were communicated to all team members. He emphasised that customer satisfaction was paramount. The vision gave team members a sense of purpose. All team members had internalised this vision and committed to delivering the project in a way that could meet customer requirements. Hans's leadership and management style quickly became apparent to everyone; he arranged to have attractive posters with the values and ways of working printed and hung up on the corridor walls for everyone to see including the customers.

Keeping everybody in the loop

Following the kick-off meeting, to which everyone attended, the scope and deliverables of the project were jointly defined. Two teams with members from both Telefon

Table 1. Project Tango's ways of working.

People drive our success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We live by and comply with the REVIVE principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience: spring back quickly from difficulties and challenges • Empathise: understand our team members and customers • Voice: speak as one voice to our customer • Innovation: thinking beyond the now • Value: support the team members and customers • Excel: what we do, we do our best – We trust and empower our teammates/stakeholders to contribute – We do not know everything, so we look to learn new things and trust that we will be provided with the tools to develop – We look after each other and ourselves – It is OK to ask for help – We are respectful of peoples' need for work/life balance – We treat everyone with trust, respect and dignity, and take time to genuinely listen – We give credit for a job well done – We value contributions, even if they differ from our own viewpoints – We have fun along the way
Working together as one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There is no room for personal agendas; we work together as a team – We adapt readily to changing circumstances once we understand the purpose and impact of the change – When we have made a decision, we speak with 'one voice' and we expect everyone to support that 'one voice' once the decision has been made – We accept and learn from our honest mistakes and do not point fingers – We will actively help the organisation to deliver to the objectives of the project – When we find problems that need escalating, we help to find solutions – We look out for each other; 'it is not just about you', it is also about us
Acting with openness and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If we do not like it, we fix it – not fudge it – We are upfront and honest with others and ourselves – We do what we say – We start meetings on time and end on time; if you are going to be late, let someone know – We demonstrate ethical behaviour – We look for better ways of doing things – We are never afraid to make people mad as long as we are making a point we believe in and are acting professionally

and Kommunika were organised: the steering committee and the working group. Besides these joint teams, Telefon and Kommunika had their own internal steering committees. Due to the significance of this project, there were monthly meeting updates called 'All Hands' between Kommunika and Telefon, including suppliers.

With a project of this complexity, the probability of things going wrong was high. Hans realised the importance of establishing efficient communication channels. Thus, to mitigate the risk of slow communication or miscommunication and have a fast response in case of risk events happening, he insisted in having the project team members from both Kommunika and Telefon co-located at the latter's facilities in West Auckland. Having both project team in one building was not a piece of cake; it was often the case that someone from the customer team would confront the project team and ask critical questions. Team members had complained to Hans regarding this issue, but Hans's answer was that they needed to smooth things over and keep the good relationship going with customers. In hindsight, Joe reflected that 'when things go wrong, the relationship with the customer is

what will get you across the line'. Indeed, since the early stages of the project, Hans proactively developed a very close professional relationship with the Telefon programme director. They often met for coffee and lunch; during these gatherings, they informally discussed the issues affecting the project and made decisions, which were later formalised in the project plan and communicated to the project team.

Hans paid attention to detail; he was meticulous with project documentation. Communication with all the project stakeholders – that is, both Kommunika and Telefon team members as well as suppliers – was carefully planned, dutifully managed and strictly monitored. Hans arranged weekly internal project meetings, weekly customer meetings and monthly meetings with the steering committee that included all the relevant parties. As needed, there were also specific project meetings among Kommunika, Telefon and suppliers to share detailed information about specialised areas (e.g. products) or functionalities (e.g. pricing). Extraordinary meetings were called on an ad hoc basis when issues that required urgent attention.

Table 2. Project Tango communication plan.

What	Who	How	When	Information providers
Issues and risks report	Kommunika project team	Meeting and hard copy	Weekly – every Monday	Programme managers
Milestone report	Kommunika and Telefon project teams	Meeting and email	Weekly – every Friday	Kommunika programme director
Project status reports and agendas	Steering committee	Meeting and hard copy	Monthly	Programme directors of Kommunika and Telefon
Business change requests	Kommunika project team	Video call	Bimonthly	Business team manager (Derek)
Urgent cases	Senior managers of Kommunika and Telefon	Email/Video call	Ad hoc	Programme director (Hans)

In devising the project communications plan, Hans took into consideration stakeholders' involvement along two dimensions: autonomy and interest. Hans classified the stakeholders based on their autonomy over the work and their interest in it. He has created an autonomy/interest grid for stakeholder prioritisation. Stakeholders would now be kept informed with timely information that reduced unnecessary interruptions and confusion and provided the programme/project managers with more autonomy. He established that stakeholders with a low degree of autonomy but high interest needed to be informed. Conversely, if their autonomy was high and their interest low, they needed to be satisfied. If both their autonomy and interest were low, they only needed general information. However, if both their autonomy and interest were high, communication had to be managed tightly. For example, Kommunika and Telefon project teams had been highly involved in Project Tango and all the information should have been transferred among them timely. Therefore, tight communication was essential.

The communication plan that Hans had created was intended to provide clear guidelines to define *what* information needed to be collected, *who* would receive the information, *how* it would be communicated and *when* information would be transmitted to the stakeholders. By identifying and prioritising the stakeholders, Hans planned the type and frequency of the communications. Table 2 presents the Project Tango communication plan.

Before the internal meetings at Kommunika on Mondays, Sarah collected the status reports from the programme managers – that is, Peter, Joe, Bill and Jack. She combined these status reports into a consolidated programme report, which was to be emailed to all meeting participants a few hours, if not the Friday, before the meeting. The programme report contained the encountered Risks and treatment plan, Issues, Actions, Dependencies and Milestones (RIADM). Because of its content and frequency, the programme report became known as the 'weekly RIADM'. During the meeting, the programme managers presented the status of the tasks under their areas of responsibility. The team adopted a colour-coded system that represented the status of the project tasks:

red and green; red colour denoted a task behind schedule, while green indicates a task on schedule. If the status of a task was red, the responsible programme manager had to propose the go-to-green (GTG) plan. Following the programme managers' presentation, Hans wrote the proposed solutions on a chart. This process continued until all ideas had been expressed, discussed and clarified within the group. Then, the preferred solutions became the GTG plan. 'Hans was very good at enquiring and doing a deep dive', Joe said with a smirk. Hans could quickly identify the project problems, their root causes and come up with the top three that needed immediate actions. In the subsequent meetings, the actions from previous meetings were reviewed to ensure that the effectiveness of the GTG plan.

The joint meetings between Kommunika and Telefon took place every Friday afternoon. Starting at 14:00, Hans along with his programme managers met with their Telefon's counterparts to walk through the more than 5000 lines in the MS Project-generated Gantt chart for 3 h, sometimes longer, to check the current status of the project. They focused on milestones achievement and tracked cost and schedule variances. Sarah made sure to keep track of variances to be included in the reports to the stakeholders. By going through the Gantt charts and supporting documentation, the emergent issues and impending risks could be identified in these meetings. In one occasion, they realised that there was a huge delay in the delivery of a radio access part from China due to the wrong configuration; this issue represented a risk event with catastrophic consequences for the project. Since it was not possible to push the project timeline, the agreed solution was to contact another supplier through the Kommunika branch in China to get the part as soon as possible.

Also, depending on the nature of the information to be shared, especially for particular needs, Hans had to establish one-off communications with some stakeholders. For instance, it is a legal requirement in New Zealand to allow the Police to intercept telephonic communications provided they have a warrant. This legal requirement automatically made the Police another project stakeholder, who at some point was involved in the testing.

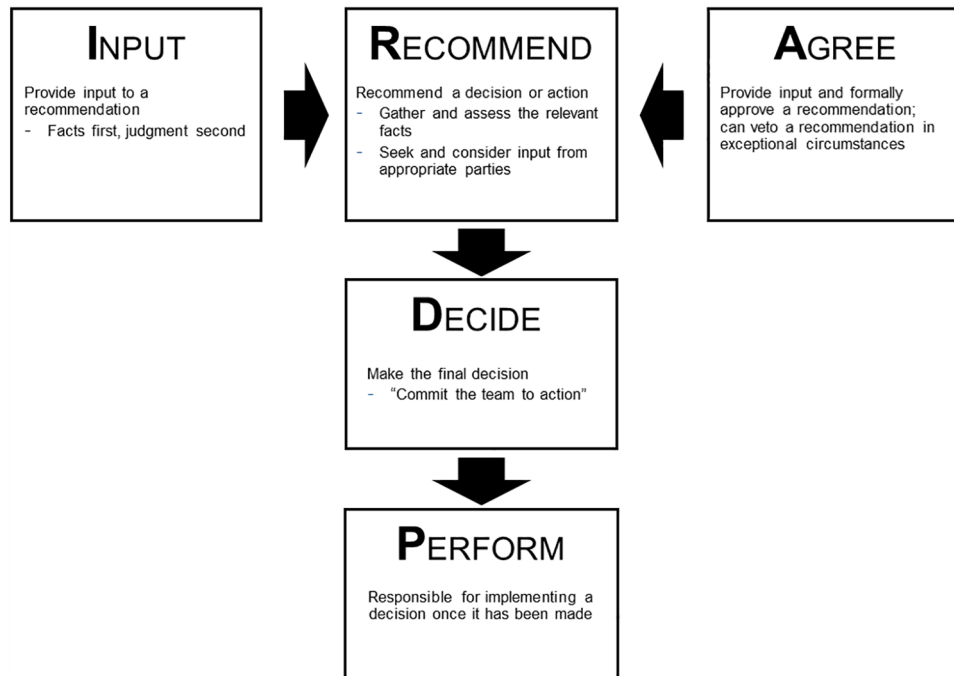


Figure 2. Project Tango RAPID framework.

Defining responsibilities for making decisions

A decision-making framework provided the overarching guideline for the project. This framework was designed to allocate decision roles: Recommend, Agree, Perform, Input and Decide (RAPID). All programme managers believed that the RAPID framework was very effective as it clearly depicted who needed to provide input, who recommended a course of action, who agreed with the recommended course of action, who was the decision-maker and who was responsible for performing the task, as shown in Figure 2.

The RAPID framework was intentionally designed to represent most of the situations the team members would encounter during the project lifecycle. In other words, it was designed for the rule; not for the exception. Four fundamental principles governed the implementation of the RAPID framework:

1. It was agreed that the same person could perform more than one RAPID role, as long as the responsibilities were clearly established for the decision to be made.
2. Not every decision will have an Agree or Input; however, all decisions must have a Recommend, Decide and Perform.
3. If the Recommend and Decide fall in the same area of the project, assigning an Agree to a different area should be used as a check and balance.

4. In exceptional circumstances, a decision can be escalated to a higher level (e.g. a decision pertaining to regulatory or legal issues).

The RAPID framework was rigorously enforced. For instance, if the decision-maker was not able to attend a meeting, the meeting was simply cancelled. Often, Hans was the decision-maker for all the group tasks, while Sarah took notes of the discussions in the meetings for documentation purposes. During steering committee monthly meetings among Kommunika, Telefon and all stakeholders, led by Hans, the discussions were around project risks, issues, progress, what kind of support was needed and what resources from any region of the world were needed.

Kommunika project team were equipped with support to provide insightful inputs for recommendations or propose actions. Kommunika had a strong knowledge base with complex structured and unstructured information that enabled project members to come up with reliable inputs, find the solutions, offer actions and deliver the service faster. If there was a technical issue or schedule and cost issue, project members could search the knowledge base to find out if anyone from Kommunika globally had come across these issues. Moreover, they could log a case to ask for expert opinions to fix the issues. For instance, in one occasion, Joe needed a technical architect for a service layer issue. He logged a case in Kommunika's knowledge base and got a list of people, from the global office, who were capable and available for the period Joe needed the architect. Joe identified that the

professional with the right characteristics was based in the Kommunika branch in Cyberjaya, Malaysia. Flying the architect in was not a problem; in less than 2 weeks since the requirement was placed, the person joined the Tango team in Auckland.

Selecting suppliers and sourcing parts

Given the technical nature of the project, the procurement needs were diverse, defined by technical specifications – from the land on which the mobile cell towers would be installed on to radio equipment. These needs had to be clearly specified in the procurement plan. Based on the business and technical requirements, the project team shared their inputs about the processes of the group tasks within each core team. The programme managers then identified the required parts; Hans approved and placed the orders. For those components that could be available in the local market or produced by local manufacturers (e.g. standard kits, racks), the responsible team would liaise with the local suppliers. Many other parts required for Project Tango had to be imported. Since Kommunika was a telecommunication technology provider, some of the parts required could be sourced through its branches abroad, such as Australia, Japan, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, quite often, parts had to be directly obtained from overseas suppliers. Regardless of the source, given the centralised nature of the procurement framework intended to guarantee administrative control, Kommunika's central Procurement Office in Wellington processed and kept records of all orders for Project Tango. Hans knew very well that introducing parts from overseas into the country added an extra layer of the administrative process and required the participation of the New Zealand Customs Service. Because of this, Hans went beyond the rule of keeping the procurement office in the loop; he endeavoured to make them take ownership of the process. This proactive approach resulted in highly beneficial for Project Tango. Joe recalled when an urgently needed piece of radio equipment was held up by customs at Auckland Airport; he vividly recounted:

It was taking quite a long time to get it cleared. I went to see Hans, who on the spot made a phone call to the guys in the Procurement Office. Hans, being Hans, strongly requested their intervention, 'This is an urgent matter. Your assistance will be highly appreciated. Thanks'. Within 48 hours, the part arrived. What can I say? Hans was a persuasive person!

In the planning stage of the project, programme managers contacted part suppliers to produce a cost estimation of the programmes under their responsibility. Then, all programme budgets were consolidated to produce the overall estimated budget for Project Tango. During the project execution, programme managers had to make sure that their purchase

orders were in line with the planned budget within a margin of $\pm 5\%$. Two main factors explain the rationale behind this margin. The first one was given by the fact that many of the suppliers were from overseas, exposing Project Tango to currency exchange rate fluctuations. The second reason was given by the price variations that may occur over time. Fortunately, exchange rates and prices were highly stable, so cost variances for supplies were negligible throughout the project lifecycle, as the programme managers had anticipated. As part of the procurement process defined for Project Tango, Telefon had to sign off the parts to be acquired. Based on their experience in similar projects, programme managers were not much concerned about cost variances; however, they paid particular attention to quality. Hans reflected,

The key thing about procurement was not so much about buying stuff because buying them is easy. You just issue the purchase order, then you get the part delivered to you. Usually, the cost of the part was very well aligned with our estimated budget. The critical issue was whether the required part met the technical specifications.

Because quality was not to be compromised at all, Hans had a list of preferred suppliers, whom he trusted. When it came to selecting suppliers, Hans followed his gut feeling and chose suppliers those he trusted the most based on their performance in previous projects rather than choosing those who could have been considered the best in the industry. Except for unique requirements, Hans instructed programme managers to place purchase orders from the preferred suppliers. For instance, when Joe requested a part for the SMS module from a provider in Australia that was not in the list of preferred suppliers, he had to make the case before Hans to get his approval.

Unexpected news

On Monday the 10th of December 2012, Hans was informed that the acquisition of Telefon by another telecommunications corporation was imminent; negotiations were in the final stages. The acquiring company, which had already deployed a 4G network in New Zealand, had other strategic priorities. In reality, what made Telefon attractive was its customer base. In terms of delivery of the project, the 4G product was launched and all the intercompany contracts were signed. Even though Project Tango was considered by all accounts – completed on time, on budget at the agreed scope – a successful one, changed priorities forced its closure without being deployed.

Hans was shocked at hearing this news and the worst part was delivering it to the team. Hans circulated an email to all Kommunika's team members and invited them for a meeting. He spent the whole day thinking about the possible questions from the team and how to deliver the message. No matter how carefully he chose the words, the effect would be the same. The truth was: 'Project Tango

will not see the light of day'. Hans avoided corporate-speak to hide the sad fact in jargon, though he delivered the news in a calm and emphatic manner. It was a huge shock to the team, who had worked 60 h/week for the last 12 months on a project that was ready to go. Hans explained the reasons behind this decision that the change of priority forced the closure of this project. The team sat in disbelief. Then he allowed the team to vent while he just listened.

Questions to discuss

- Evaluate the criteria/process that Kommunika followed to form the team, especially the appointment of Hans and the programme managers.
- Analyse how Hans's interaction with the Kommunika team evolved over time. Analyse the conflicts in the Project Tango team.
- Discuss how the established ground rules influenced Project Tango?
- Evaluate the efficiency of the Project Tango communication plan. How did it contribute to the completion of the project both on time and on budget?
- Identify the stakeholders involved in the procurement process and analyse how it was managed.
- Following the unexpected end of the project, discuss the Project Tango closure. How would you have shared the news with the team?

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