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What do you hold in your hands?

It's complicated

Let's hope it's something that will make your life easier in the next few weeks until being an Objectivity Project Manager becomes second nature to you. With little fuss and muss, these few pages should help you understand what lies ahead for you, and how to handle it without winding up back at square one.

Obviously, this isn't a compendium of knowledge to get you ready for a certification exam, but if you think something is missing here, just ask for help! We're not such a big company that we won't take the time to show you the ropes: this is a team effort.
Do you know where you are?

Most probably you already have a desk, a chair, a computer, a mobile, and perhaps some other gadgets. That’s just about everything you need for work.

PMs don’t work in a vacuum, so most likely all the people around you belong to your team. Be nice to them! Believe me, if your cooperation goes well, they’ll do everything you ask, and you’ll enjoy peace and quiet. It may also be the case that there is no team yet. If this is so, another PM or a Tribe Master (Program Manager) will be around. They won’t do your work for you, but they can provide loads of support. So, I’d suggest being nice to them too! All in all, being nice to other people is generally considered a good thing at Objectivity, so take a risk and be nice to everyone.

Now let’s get down to business – when considering your seating arrangements, we’ve tried our best to place you near the people that you’ll be working directly with. If this isn’t the case, two things might have happened:

1. There is an exception to the rule which you already know about.

2. Something terrible has happened! Go straight to the PM Guild Master, whom you’ve already met. If you haven’t met them yet, either a complete disaster is unfolding, or you are just in the wrong building. If it’s the latter, leave as quietly as possible and call for help.
A few words about our structure – rather boring but useful

Our structure is based on the Guilds and Tribes model.

This is a relatively new model designed to support team autonomy in decision-making. In addition, it intends to eliminate multi-level (boring and rigid) structures of managers and directors, which are associated with inertia and long decision-making process. Since project teams are agile, management should follow this model as well.

In a nutshell, each project/program is a “start-up”, and the Tribe Master, together with the team, decides about how it develops. This approach leads to effective and motivated teams that work close to their customers and make decisions about themselves.

A few words about the structure:

Tribe – a team or numerous project teams working for a customer.

Tribe Master – in the old nomenclature (which is just as boring) this was called a Program Manager, who is responsible for the delivery and the team. They ensure that teams have all the tools and processes necessary to carry out projects. As the “start-up” owners, they have an entire project team reporting linearly to them (whether directly or indirectly).

Chapter – a group of people within the Tribe who have the same skillsets. For example, this can be a group of developers or testers.

Chapter Lead – line manager of the people in the group (Chapter). This person manages their development and holds One to One meetings. They also frequently perform a technical function within the group, for example, coding. Leads in turn report linearly to the Tribe Master.

Guild – the same thing as a Chapter, but encompasses the entire company. We have Guilds of developers, testers, architects, analysts, and many others. There are also Guilds in Guilds, for example, Technical Architects. They are a part of the Developers’ Guild, but within its framework, they have their own Guild. The idea behind the Guild is sharing knowledge and experience between the Tribes in order to avoid silos.

Guild Master – is the leader of a Guild. The Guild Master has no team and is not a line manager. This person’s main task is to support the development of teams and ensure knowledge sharing among Tribes. They ensure consistency of processes and tools. The Guild Master supports the organization of company-wide training sessions, events, and campaigns associated with “thought leadership”, like presentations at conferences. They also help in recruitment processes for Tribes, and together with Tribe Masters and Chapter Leads take decisions about employment.

Sounds cool? I hope so. In our opinion, you’ll find no better environment for supporting ambitious and passionate people. If your past jobs made you sick and tired of situations where getting a hot cup of coffee required five approvals and four meetings, we know exactly how you feel. That’s why we put the coffee maker on your desk.

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1 The One to One is a meeting lasting between 30 minutes and one hour with your leader, during which you can whinge, cry, complain, request, praise, deal with, organize, gossip, motivate, and do plenty of other things. These are usually organized once every few weeks.
You are a part of a Tribe, which is responsible for projects. **The Tribe Master is your boss**, and you can go to them at any time to discuss anything.

So this means you’ll have One to One meetings with them. During these meetings, you’ll plan your development and solve everyday problems. Let me assure you, Tribe Masters are wonderful people who know the customers you’ll work with inside and out. With time, they’ll share a lot of project knowledge with you and form your first line support. However, if for some reason one of them gets on your nerves and you don’t feel like talking to them about issues you have, the PM Guild Master is always at your disposal.
Project, program – let’s get straight to the point

Project roles

For the majority of projects, you’ll have a team to work with. We know that most of the project roles are old hat to you, but it’s worth discussing how we perceive these roles in our company.

Developer

In Objectivity, you will meet only good and very good developers. These are the only kinds we employ! The vast majority of them have at least three years of experience working as software developers.

Each of them has their own strengths and preferred technologies. It’s crucial that you use these strengths appropriately once you get to know your team better. Some of them are senior developers – they support you in your communication with the customer, and with the organization of work from the technical perspective. You may confidently entrust them with writing the hardest parts of the code, dividing large functionalities into small tasks, and solving all types of programming problems.

From here we go sublime – developers are the salt of the earth and one of the two major elements of the project team (the other being testers). Look after the developers, and in return, they’ll deliver your projects on time (and if fate smiles upon you, maybe even on the budget!).
Tester (QE)

A Tester performs one of the essential project roles. Every developer says that their code is error-free, but we prefer the "trust and verify" approach.

Testers are a part of your team from the very beginning of the project, consistent with the assumptions of the agile methodologies. As the name suggests, they deal with testing in its broad sense. They're responsible for manual, automatic, performance, and plenty of other tests. As it happens, some of them are highly specialized in one of these areas. If you've got someone like this on your team, remember to use their skills appropriately.

Business Analyst (BA)

The Business Analyst helps you understand who the customer is and what their needs are. So the BA describes how the system we create is supposed to work, along with many other things.

Mainly, the BA engages in sharing this knowledge with the team. The BA makes sure that the developer knows what to develop and the tester knows what to test. The BA makes sure that the team knows what the entire system is supposed to be, and doesn't let developers focus only on their individual sections. Because the Business Analyst works much more closely with the business side of things, they can provide you with additional information, and sometimes hold talks with the customer without getting you involved.

They will also frequently suggest some solutions to the customer that we as a company can offer.
Architect (TA)

The Architect is like an experienced captain, sometimes called the “salty dog”. The crew, meaning the developers, will follow them everywhere.

With the help of our Architects, you may confidently sail through any rough waters occurring in a project. They’re the first ones to start discovering customer needs. Together with the Business Analyst, they’ll help you define the functional and non-functional requirements for the system being created. They’ll create a structure that satisfies the customer’s expectations and ensures high code quality. If necessary, they’re happy to code something themselves. Even though their knowledge is extensive, they are not just theoreticians. They have learned the trade inside and out, and they love it!

UI Developer

Implementation of graphic interfaces, especially in web systems, is a tough task. That’s why it is delegated to specialists.

A UI Developer can convert a .jpg into live HTML with CSS. They take the trouble to make sure various browsers are supported. They create the foundations of a given site, which are then filled in with functionality by other developers. It’s important not to expect UI Developers to create graphics from scratch, nor to write stored procedures in SQL. But can they use Photoshop? Of course!
UX Specialist

This is the person who helps to create a GUI that future users will be comfortable clicking on, and will even want to do so.

For this to happen, the UX Specialist should be a part of the project from the very beginning in order to understand it as a user. The UX Specialist clicks almost as proficiently as an analyst. This individual doesn’t just advise the team and the customer on the appearance of the user interface, but also conducts tests with end users. The UX tests form a separate task. While this requires special planning, it lets us eliminate a lot of errors that might discourage future users. If the customer can’t afford to pay 100% for this project role, it’s always possible to cooperate with a UX Specialist at key project moments, like demos or backlog grooming. That said, for many customers this position is, let’s say, exotic, so please remember that it’s sometimes worth offering it initially as an unbillable. This way the customer learns to appreciate the great value added by this role.

Team Leader

Depending on the size of your Tribe, you may work with one or more teams. We usually leave a lot of breathing space for the team, letting them organize work in their own way. Within a group of individuals and mavericks, on rare occasions, a gem of a leader emerges.

It is these leaders who make sure that the process takes place in compliance with the assumed criteria and work standards. They will also do a wonderful job of keeping team spirits high and help team members make it through the everyday hardships of Sprint ceremonies. Team leaders help you facilitate communication with your teams and, if everything goes well, you won’t always have to be in three places at the same time.
Visual Designer

Visual Designers (a.k.a. graphic designers) are real wizards who move UX-made mockups into the world of colours, interfaces, and all sorts of pixels.

They play a crucial role in our project teams! In the initial phase of a project, they work with the team in order to make the proposed solution as functional as possible, particularly in graphical terms. Then, they create designs of desktop or mobile screens ensuring compliance with the client’s branding guidelines. After acceptance of the graphics, it’s time to work on the style guides of the interface’s individual elements. The UI Developer uses this as the basis to code the subsequent application blocks. You can also encounter graphic designers in production, where they are probably adding additional screens, or ensuring the consistency of what the developers have created with the initial designs.
General approach and methodologies

As you already know, we’re an agile organization and we try to implement this mindset everywhere, not only in delivery-related teams. That’s why you can see Scrum or Kanban boards in almost every room.

That said, these methodologies have been implemented to the largest extent in development. Obviously, the degree of agility is closely related to customer awareness. Building this awareness is also one of your principal tasks. In some cases, we may suggest to our customers that they work with external consultants we recommend in order to understand how important this all is.

Tools

We usually use JIRA/Project Server or TFS/VSTS. Sometimes these tools are on the customer’s side, sometimes on ours. Sometimes there are completely different tools, sometimes there are no tools at all and you need to propose something.

As always, the Guild is here to help. You will be equipped with a toolbox including a standard set of templates, tables, and reports.
Process – take it easy and read on before you have a heart attack

Yes, a "process" may sound unpleasant but if it’s suitably flexible and simple, it may be very helpful.

This is why we’ve created several processes that meet those requirements. If in your opinion one of the steps in some process is pointless, outdated, or obsolete, tell us about it! We’ll change it immediately. Processes are supposed to systemize our work, not to disturb us or disengage our critical thinking. Here we won’t go into details about processes. We’ll talk about them some other time.

Bidding

Before we’re ready to launch a new project, we have to win one!

Don’t worry, there’s a sales team in Objectivity devoted to keeping all of us busy. They are engaged in many different bidding processes with both existing and new customers. Not only do they have to understand the client’s requirements, but also to convince them that we and our way of working are the best way to get what they need. This often requires a discovery phase involving one or several trips on-site so we can get to know each other a bit better.
The first step is drafting a PID (Project Initiation Document).

This term is borrowed from the PRINCE2 project methodology. It’s just a document that describes the project. There is a template that you can use for this purpose. But because every project is different, it would be unreasonable to expect all the elements of the template to fit every time. The purpose of drafting a PID is to define the goal we want to achieve and the manner in which we want to achieve it. Sometimes it’ll be a high-level backlog with a rough estimate, other times a team proposal within a set time. Thus, the form and content of the PID can be chosen freely. Naturally, you will have a wide variety of legacy examples to pick and mix from.

This is the basis for project progress monitoring (in days, Story Points, sprints or flowers, whatever the customer expects), so the basic project metrics must be included in the PID. When you draft a PID, you must get approval from the customer. Various conclusions can be drawn from such confirmation – for example, a customer usually reads documents before signing them, so you can be sure that the customer has reviewed our proposal at least once.

Once you’ve drafted the PID, you know more or less what you want to do, what team you want to use, and what your time frames are. The last thing is to organize the kick-off meeting. This is a meeting where, together with the customer and your team, you tell each other what you want to achieve in the project and how. It’s very important to engage the customer and get them to share their vision with the project team. This is an excellent opportunity to get to know each other better, so either invite the customer to visit us, or pack your team’s bags and go on a trip. Please remember that nothing beats time spent face-to-face, so try your best to get some. Certainly, your project or program may require some additional documents or meetings. You’ll find this out specifically during your first meetings with the team and the customer.

From here on out, it’s downhill all the way. Everybody knows what to do and when to do it by, so now you need to perform.

At this stage of the project, your Scrum knowledge will be useful. Right now, it’s pointless to dwell on what is daily-standup, sprint planning or retrospective because it’s the subject of a separate training. If you need additional support in this matter, we may provide it to you. Most importantly, your team or another PM have probably gone through this subject more than once, so ask them for support. In an extreme case contact the Guild Master PM, they’ll surely do something about it.
Some practices/elements that differ from standard Scrum – a few words about them

PMO – Project Support

Is a role that you might not have dealt with before. These are the people who provide you with the most current project data and insights essential to your everyday work.

They’ll help you draw up reports (daily burn up/burn down/Project Assurance), prepare any Excel spreadsheet you need concerning your team, and provide support in meetings by taking minutes. Their amazing abilities reach superpower level whenever they start working with the company’s Data Scientist guild. It’s incredible what you can learn about your project if you just ask them the right questions.

You must work out the precise scope of this assistance with the PMO. Every project is different, so requirements will also be different. Meet with this person at the beginning of the project, talk about your cooperation, and agree how you can help each other. At the beginning of each project, this person will be introduced to you by the PMO Guild Master.
Project Assurance

Is another one of our innovations. You’ll be provided with detailed training on this subject, but it’s worth saying a few words here on what it’s all about.

What we want to achieve is to agree a weekly project status based on a standard. Therefore, once a week, you’ll meet someone from the PA team and talk about your project. It’s very similar to the code review that we practice in development. In our opinion, it is very helpful when someone from the outside looks at a project. This may open your eyes to things you haven’t thought of before. Please remember that it’s not about monitoring or oversight, but rather about providing support.

Apart from everything you’ve read so far, there’s plenty of other things that are impossible to discuss here. You probably won’t learn everything in the series of inductions and training sessions ahead of you. Therefore, please remember that this knowledge is always somewhere to be found. It’s enough to just seek it out and ask for it. One of the cardinal sins is assuming something rather than asking questions about it. We’re all here for you, ready and willing to help, so take advantage of this.
Wow! It seems like that’s all there is to say about projects, so let’s sum up...

The role of the Project Manager, your role, is very important in our company.

You shape the cooperation with both team and customer. You are the face of our organization to the customer, and you’re responsible for our image. Our development is heavily dependent on you because you establish the relationship with the customer and the team. Therefore, every time you make a decision, please consider how it will influence both us as a company and the customer, and whether it’s the best thing we can do. If not, do everything to make it the best.