

TWO IN A BOX

Trexin's approach to successful program management.

True or false: a program requires a single program manager to effectively lead implementation. What about a program with a \$70+ million dollar annual budget? Or one with 500 resources in multiple locations on 2 continents? Or a program that is replacing a business critical system? What about a program that will serve the company's largest client? How about one that will touch every single one of the company's several million customers? Even the most skilled and dedicated program manager cannot independently manage such high-visibility and complex programs. That is why Trexin promotes the "two in a box" structure for large program implementation. I have outlined below just a few of the benefits of the two in a box program management approach.

1. **Efficiency:** This model allows for one program manager to focus "up & out", while the other focuses "in & down". The larger a program, the more complex the stakeholder community and likely need for hands-on interaction with key stakeholders. The up & out program manager can focus on client, executive, and sponsoring stakeholders, as well as decision, issue, and risk management that requires input from this group. Meanwhile the in & down program manager can focus on communicating decisions to the rest of the team, driving day-to-day delivery, and resolving issues and risks before they require escalation. The up & out program manager looks at dependencies across the enterprise, the in & down program manager looks at dependencies across the different workstreams or projects that comprise the program.
2. **Mentorship:** Typically, the up & out program manager is a seasoned veteran in program management, with experience running increasingly complex programs and tried and true strategies for coping with any surprises along the way. The in & down program manager can be newer to the program management space, likely earlier in his/her career. This model is an opportunity for apprenticeship, placing the in & down program manager on a fast-track to being able to manage larger and more complex programs sooner than if trained through the more standard method of managing increasingly large projects as a project manager. Although many of the skillsets and responsibilities of program managers and project managers overlap, there are some unique requirements of program managers that are more easily learned in the two in a box structure.
3. **Longevity:** Having two people in the program management role allows for coverage for time off, preventing burnout and resource turnover. The lengthy timeline of complex programs, with multiple deployments, high stakes, and long hours often increases the likelihood of premature departure. The dual program managers can balance the workload between the two of them maximizing the chances for a reasonable work/life balance without risking program disruption.
4. **Cohesion:** An alternative to the two in a box structure would be to split the program into smaller pieces to make them more easily managed. This risks transparency of dependencies, prevents workstreams from learning from each other's successes (and failures), and increases the likelihood of duplicative or redundant work across the program. It is far easier for two people to connect on a daily, or more frequent basis, than it is for members of completely different teams to stay abreast of new developments.

Trexin piloted this approach on a product implementation at a health insurance company, a new product touching nearly 500,000 lives. The complexities included a high-touch client, shortened timeline, and innovative offerings that required both technology and process changes throughout the company in order to launch. Both Trexin's client and our client's client credited the high-quality program management with the short-term and long-term success of the

program. The up & out program manager rolled off shortly after the go-live to start up another large program, and the in & down program manager took over as the team transitioned into operations.

To be successful, the dual program managers need to have an exemplary working relationship, and should balance out each other's strengths and weaknesses. If possible, the two should be staffed together to ensure an appropriate pairing. However, the up & out program manager is frequently staffed first to help stand-up the program, bringing the less experienced half of the pair onboard after planning is well underway. Either approach works as long as you have the right people identified and allow for time to gain alignment. The old saying, "two heads are better than one" certainly applies for this program management approach, although at Trexin we prefer to say "two heads, two hearts, and four hands are better than one."

For more information on Trexin's Head, Heart, and Hands approach, please click [here](#).



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