

Messenger

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Project Manager Skills

This month we're going to focus on the necessary skills a project manager must possess in order to be effective. While this may be common knowledge to some of you, let's first look at what a project is and some obstacles that it may face.

A project is a temporary process which has a clearly defined start and end time, a knowable set of tasks, a management structure and a budget that is developed to accomplish a well-defined goal or objective. We deal with projects of various size and length in all aspects of our lives. It could be a building project, a marketing campaign, or, on the home front, getting our kids' rooms clean. A project is deemed successful if it is:

- Within the allocated time period
- Within the budgeted cost
- At the proper performance or specification level
- With acceptance by the customer
- With minimum scope changes
- Without disturbing the main work flow of the organization
- Without changing the corporate culture

There are also certain obstacles that can try to derail a project. For the sake of time, we are only going to look at three of them, even though there are many.

Project complexity

There are some projects that are naturally more

complex than others. For example, a multi-million dollar building project is going to have more facets and steps than installing a new computer network. While both of these are very important projects, the building project has more areas in which delays or other problems may occur.

Customer's special requirements and scope changes

Before a project begins, you should always have a thorough interview with the customer in order to gain the exact requirements and needs that the project should fulfill. There are times, however, when the customer will request something a little unusual or they will completely change a section of the project with little or no notice. When this occurs, it wastes valuable time and money to get the project back on track.



Project risks

Some projects will have more risks than others. Developing a detailed risk analysis before the project begins will help you to avoid as many risks as possible.

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Labor disgraces no man; unfortunately, you occasionally find men who disgrace labor.

*Ulysses Grant (1822-1885)
18th US President*

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At the very least, you will have developed a contingency plan to know what to do if the risk does occur. Minimizing the potential risks will decrease the amount of time spent in putting out fires.

Now let's look at where the project manager fits into the project. The project manager has a seemingly endless list of duties that he/she must perform. Some of their major responsibilities are to meet contractual profit objectives, to make all required decisions, to complete all the work while staying within the original cost and time constraints, and to resolve all conflicts. While this is no where close to an exhaustive list, these few things can still seem intimidating.

The project manager must control company resources within time, cost, and performance. He or she is in charge of the money, manpower, equipment, facilities, materials, and information/technology needed to complete the project. He/she must also coordinate and integrate activities across multiple departments. He/she must be able to develop a project plan, execute it, and make any changes necessary.

In order to complete a task, a project manager must:

- Set objectives
- Establish plans
- Organize resources
- Provide staffing
- Set up controls
- Issue directives
- Motivate personnel
- Apply innovation for alternative actions
- Remain flexible

A key to success for a project manager is to have excellent time management skills. There are three rules that a project manager should always follow:

1. What am I doing that I don't have to be doing at all?

2. What am I doing that can be done better by someone else?
3. Am I establishing the right priorities for my activities?

Remember, the job of a project manager is not to do everything on his or her own. It's to find the most capable people for the job and have them do it.

Project managers have a very stressful and demanding job. They are continually under pressure to make sure the project is coming in on time and under budget. Remembering these rules may save you some headaches along the way.



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