

# INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT

## LECTURE 1

### ***THE ROLE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER***

#### *IN THIS LECTURE*

- *Review the different roles played by the project manager*
- *Review the key skills every project manager should possess*
- *Learn why some project managers are much more successful than others*
- *Understand the common mistakes made by many project managers*

#### One Title, Many Roles

You've likely heard many of the analogies before to describe the role of the project manager – the “captain” of the ship, the “conductor” of the orchestra, the “coach” of the team, the “catalyst” of the engine, and so on. There's truth and insight in each of the analogies, but each can be incomplete as well. To gain better understanding of what a project manager does, let's briefly discuss each of the key roles played by the project manager:

- **Planner** – ensures that the project is defined properly and completely for success, all stakeholders are engaged, work effort approach is determined, required resources are available when needed, and processes are in place to properly execute and control the project.
- **Organizer** – using work breakdown, estimating and scheduling techniques, determines the complete work effort for the project, the proper sequence of the work activities, when the work will be accomplished, who will do the work, and how much the work will cost.
- **Point Man** – serves as the central point-of-contact for all oral and written project communications.
- **Quartermaster** – ensures the project has the resources, materials, and facilities its needs when it needs it.
- **Facilitator** – ensures that stakeholders and team members who come from different perspectives understand each other and work together to accomplish the project goals.
- **Persuader** - gains agreement from the stakeholders on project definition, success criteria, and approach; manage stakeholder expectations throughout the project while managing the competing demands of time, cost, and quality; and gains agreement on resource decisions and issue resolution action steps.

- **Problem Solver** – utilizes root-cause analysis process experience, prior project experiences, and technical knowledge to resolve unforeseen technical issues and to take any necessary corrective actions.
- **Umbrella** – works to shield the project team from the politics and “noise” surrounding the project, so they can stay focused and productive.
- **Coach** – determines and communicates the role each team member plays and the importance of that role to the project success, finds ways to motivate each team member, looks for ways to improve the skills of each team member, and provides constructive and timely feedback on individual performances.
- **Bulldog** – performs the follow-up to ensure that commitments are maintained, issues are resolved, and action items are completed.
- **Librarian** – manages all information, communications, and documentation involved in the project.
- **Insurance Agent** – continuously works to identify risks and to develop responses to those risk events in advance.
- **Police Officer** – consistently measures progress against the plan, develops corrective actions, reviews quality of both project processes and project deliverables.
- **Salesman** – an extension of the Persuader and Coach roles, but this role is focused on “selling” the benefits of the project to the organization, serving as a “change agent,” and inspiring team members to meet project goals and overcome project challenges.

### Key Skills of Project Managers

Although a broad range of skills is needed to effectively manage the people, process, and technical aspects of any project, it becomes clear there is a set of key skills that each project manager should have. Although these skill categories to streamline our review and discussion:

1. **Project Management Fundamentals** – the “science” part of project management, covered in these lectures, including office productivity suite (Microsoft office, email, and so on) and project management software skills.
2. **Business Management Skills** – those skills that would be equally valuable to an “operations” or “line-of-business” manager, such as budgeting, finance, procurement, organizational dynamics, team development, performance management, coaching, and motivation.

3. **Technical Knowledge** – the knowledge gained from experience and competence in the focal area of the project. With it, you greatly increase your “effectiveness” as a project manager. You have more credibility, and you can ask better questions, validate the estimates and detail plans of team members, help solve technical issues, develop better solutions, and serve more of a leadership role.
4. **Communication Skills** – because communication is regarded as the most important project management skill by the Project Management Institute (PMI), these include all written communication skills (correspondence, emails, documents), oral communication skills, facilitation skills, presentation skills, and – the most valuable – active listening. *Active listening* can be defined as “really listening” and the ability to listen with focus, empathy, and the desire to connect with the speaker.
5. **Leadership Skills** – this category overlaps with some of the others and focuses on the “attitude” and “mindset” required for project management. It also includes key skills such as interpersonal and general people skills, adaptability, flexibility, people management, degree of customer orientation, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to keep the “big picture” in mind.

### Qualities of Successful Project Managers

Given the many roles played by a project manager, the broad range of skills needed, and the inherent challenges in successfully delivering a project, we need to find ways to accelerate the learning process. Two key ways to accelerate our learning are understanding the qualities of successful project managers and understanding the common mistakes made by project managers.

Successful project managers do not share personality types, appearances, or sizes, but they do share three important features:

1. They excel in at least two of the five skill categories (Project Management Fundamentals, Business Management Skills, Technical Knowledge, Communication Skills, Leadership Skills) are either “good enough” in the other categories or staff their teams to compensate for their deficiencies.
2. They avoid the “common” mistakes described in the next section.
3. They bring a mindset and approach to project management that is best characterized by one or more of the following qualities:

- **Takes ownership** – takes responsibility and accountability for the project; leads by example, brings energy and drive to the project; without this attitude, all the skills and techniques in the world will only get you so far.
- **Savvy** – understands people and the dynamics of the organization; navigates tricky politics; has the ability to quickly read and diffuse emotionally charged situations; thinks fast on the feet; builds relationships; leverages personal power for benefit of the project.
- **Intensity with a smile** – balances as assertive, resilient, tenacious, results-oriented focus with a style that makes people want to help; consistently follows up on everything and their resolutions without “annoying” everyone.
- **Eye of the storm** – demonstrates ability to be the calm eye of the project hurricane; high tolerance for ambiguity; takes the heat from stakeholders (CEOs, business managers, and project team); exhibits a calm confident aura when others are showing signs of issue or project stress.
- **Strong customer-service orientation** – demonstrates ability to see each stakeholders perspective; able to provide voice of all key stakeholders (especially the sponsor) to the project team; has strong facilitation and collaboration skills; and has excellent active listening skills.
- **People-focused** – takes a team-oriented approach; understands that methodology, process, tools are important, but without quality people it’s very difficult to complete a project successfully.
- Always keeps **“eye on the ball”** – stays focused on the project goals and objectives. There are many ways to accomplish a given objective, which is especially important to remember when things don’t go as planned.
- **“Controlled-passion”** – balances passion for completing the project objectives with a healthy detached perspective, which enables him to make better decisions, to continue to see all points of view, to better anticipate risks, and to better respond to project issues.
- **Healthy paranoia** – balances a confident, positive outlook with a realism that assumes nothing, constantly questions, and verifies everything.
- **“Context understanding”** – understands the context of the project – the priority that your project has among the organization’s portfolio of projects and how it aligns with the overall goals of the organization.
- **Looking for trouble** – constantly looking and listening for potential risks, issues, or obstacles; confronts doubt head-on; deals with disgruntled users right away; understands that most of these situations are opportunities and can be resolved upfront before they become full-scale crisis points.

## 15 Common Mistakes of Project Managers

The most common project managers mistakes helps focus our efforts and helps us to avoid the same mistakes on our projects. The following are some of the most common mistakes made by project managers:

1. Not clearly understanding how or ensuring that the project is aligned with organizational objectives.
2. Not properly managing stakeholder expectations throughout the project.
3. Not gaining agreement and buy-in on project goals and success criteria from key stakeholders.
4. Not developing a realistic schedule that includes all work efforts, task dependencies, bottom-up estimates, and levelled assigned resources.
5. Not getting buy-in and acceptance on the project schedule.
6. Not clearly deciding and communicating who is responsible for what.
7. Not utilizing change control procedures to manage the scope of the project.
8. Not communicating consistently and effectively with all key stakeholders.
9. Not executing the project plan.
10. Not tackling key risks early in the project.
11. Not proactively identifying risks and developing contingency plans (responses) for those risks.
12. Not obtaining the right resources with the right skills at the right time.
13. Not aggressively pursuing issue resolution.
14. Inadequately defining and managing requirements.
15. Insufficiently managing and leading project team.