

10 Skills to Project Management Success

Here's a break-down of 10 skills which are critical competencies to develop in order to become proficient in your project management path to success. It's important to know what your strengths and skills are and if they match the skills needed to be a successful project manager.

#1 Be a Leader and a Manager

Leaders share and communicate a common vision on future state or an end goal; they gain agreement and establish the future direction. They motivate others.

Managers are results driven and focus on getting work done against agreed requirements.

A good project manager will constantly switch from a leader to a manager as situations require.

#2 Be a Team Builder & Leader

Projects are often cross-functional in that they use people who may not have worked together before. It is up to the project manager to set the atmosphere of the team, and to lead them through the various team development phases to the point where they perform as a team.

#3 Be an Excellent Communicator

Being a communicator means recognising that it's a two-way street. Information comes into the project and information goes out of the project.

All communications on your project should be clear and complete. As a project manager you will have to deal with both written and oral communications. Some examples are documents, meetings, reviews, reports, and assessments.

A good mental guideline is "who needs this information, who gathers and delivers it, when or how often do they need it, and in what form will I give it to them".

#4 Be a Good Organiser

Let's just think of all the aspects on a project you will need to organize. Start with project filing including all documentation, contracts, e-mails, reviews, meetings, specialist documents, requirements and specifications, reports, changes, issues, risks, etc.

It's almost impossible to stay organized without having Time Management Skills – so add this to your list!!

#5 Be a Competent Planner

The skill of planning can't be underestimated (and neither can estimating!). There are known and logical steps in creating plans. As a project manager you will certainly own the Project Plan, but it must be created with input from the team.

Examples are Project Schedules, Test Plans, Risk Management Plans, Hand-over Plans, Benefit Realisation Plans, etc. As long as you're aware that planning should become second nature to you.

#6 Be a Problem Solver

Fortunately, this is a skill that can be learned.

Firstly, you need to identify the possible 'causes' that lead to the problem 'symptom'. Causes can come from a variety of sources, some are:

- **interpersonal problems**
- **internal sources**
- **external sources**
- **technical sources**
- **management sources**
- **communication**
- **opinions or perceptions or politics**

Having found the root causes, the next step is to analyze possible options and alternatives, and determine the best course of action to take in order to resolve the problem(s).

#7 Be a Negotiator and Influencer

Negotiation is working together with other people with the intention of coming to a joint agreement. And for all these you need to have some influencing skills.

Influencing is getting events to happen by convincing the other person that your way is the better way – even if it's not what they want. Influencing power is the ability to get people to do things they would not do otherwise.

#8 Setup and Manage Budgets

At the heart of this is the skill of estimating – particularly cost estimates. Nearly always the project manager will need certain knowledge of financial techniques and systems along with accounting principles.

Part of the Project Plan will be something called the Cost Plan or often called the Project Budget. This will show the planned cost against a time-scale. The PM will want to get involved in purchasing, quoting, reconciling invoices, time sheets, etc.

The project manager then needs to establish what has actually happened as opposed to what was planned and to forecast the expected final costs. This will need to be communicated in status reports and to the Sponsor and Steering Committee.

#9 Customer first orientation

A good project manager always puts the customer first. You need to understand the customer's perspective regarding the project.

Through empathy and alliance with the client you can manage expectations better and ensure complete customer satisfaction at the end of the project.

This is possible even if the project runs over budget or over time.

#10 Knowledge of the Industry

It's really advantageous to have knowledge relevant to the industry you're working in. Without needing to be an expert, you need to be up to date with the specific industry issues and technologies important to the project you are managing.

My Motto

Within the competencies discussed, there are numerous behaviours that are dependent on your level of maturity, life experience and emotional intelligence. This is not always possible to fast-track, but will come through years of experience.

One of my favourite motto's I want to leave with you, that has always helped me on projects, are:

*“always be planning,
always be communicating and
always be building relationships”.*