

Key Skills For Project Management



Into every (or at least most) professional lives, the occasional bit of project management must fall.

And whether you're a full-time project manager or brushing up on your project management skills as part of your duties for another position, understanding and developing the skills for project manager tasks and strategy will give you an edge and help ensure *every* project is a successful one.

Every project is different, and while project management casts a wide net within any typical organization, the core management, communication, and leadership skills required to complete a successful project are useful to any aspiring project manager.

How Project Management Affects Your Business

As the adage says, a failure to plan is planning to fail. That's why so many organizations rely heavily on project management as an essential part of everything from supply chain development to marketing campaigns to internal

process improvement.

Having a plan, following it, and rolling with the punches if and when things go wrong makes it easier to use strategic problem solving in pursuit of optimal cost management, quality management, and risk management across your entire organization.

From conception to completion, managing projects large and small within your organization requires dedication, creativity, and, perhaps most importantly, tenacity.

In order to be effective, project leadership must be informed by critical thinking, high accuracy and precision, and flexibility.

To succeed, you need to manage not just the project, but the team members who'll be completing it.

That's why so many of the essential skills for project management are actually *soft skills*, also known as *interpersonal skills*.

Doing what's best for the project might require breaking free of your own headspace, looking at the problem from a new perspective (or more than one), and acting only after you've logically considered all of your options and run pros and cons for each.

Essential Project Management Skills

The best project managers bring both inspiration *and* perspiration to the table. They've got the know-how and the key skills required to succeed. Following their lead and fired up by their example, team members can complete even the most complex and challenging projects with less effort, frustration, and wasted time.

Regardless of their role or department, almost every project manager benefits from:

Agile Critical Thinking

In a perfect world, the project plan would never need to change, and everyone

could simply follow it to completion without excessive effort or frustration.

Those of us still trapped in *this* world, however, know that problems can rear their ugly little heads at any stage of any project.

That's why it's so important to be able to quickly, efficiently, and objectively analyze a situation to find an unbiased answer that's situationally relevant, rather than reactionary.

Critical thinking is the **first and most important** management skill, because it helps you contextualize problems and react based on logic and available information, instead of emotions or boilerplate.

It can be tough to learn, and even more difficult to master, but it's, well, a *critical* skill for successful project managers.

Doing what's best for the project might require breaking free of your own headspace, looking at the problem from a new perspective (or more than one), and acting only after you've logically considered all of your options and run pros and cons for each.

Creative Coaching and Inspiring Leadership

While critical thinking might require a little distance from your emotional core, providing effective coaching and inspiring leadership to your team takes well-developed interpersonal skills, plenty of empathy, and a sense of humor.

Like the protagonist of a heist movie, you're likely assembling a crack team of professionals from within not just your own department, but from across your organization.

You've likely chosen top performers in their respective areas, but it's entirely possible that the one thing these disparate souls have in common is a complete (or nearly complete) lack of project management experience.

That's where you come in. A good project manager combines personal guidance, formal training, and constant communication to create an atmosphere that supports each team member's ability to reach their goals.

Creating an open environment where questions are readily and thoroughly

answered, incentives are used to motivate self-guided completion of essential tasks (no hovering required!), and strong relationships allow potential problems to be dealt with quickly and directly, rather than allowed to fester, you'll find it much easier to engage your team in the project's success.

Core Competencies

Every project manager relies on a set of standard skill set that drives every step of the project management life cycle. These can vary by individual, but in general include:

- **Communication Skills**

The more information you can share with stakeholders and team members, the better. Develop familiarity with a wide repertoire of communication methods, including email, social media tools, and both onsite and virtual meetings to ensure the people you're relying on to complete the project have the information, guidance, and inspiration they need.

- **Risk Management**

Minimizing risk is one of the ways you can ensure your project is benefitting your organization as a whole. Automation and best practices can take a huge bite out of run-of-the-mill risk exposure from vendors, legal compliance, and value lost to unoptimized procurement. But you can still take a proactive approach to reducing risk on your project and seek out new ways to reduce exposure. This will not only boost the value generated by your project, but simplify stakeholder management by keeping the powers that be happy and well-insulated from nasty surprises.

- **Value-Focused Cost Control**

Squeezing value from every dollar spent might not be the primary thrust of your project. But collaborating with procurement to ensure maximum return on investment (ROI) while reducing total cost of ownership (TCO) will keep your project on budget and ensure you have the resources you need to reach your goals. It also elevates your project beyond mere cost

reductions into the realm of value building and reduces scope creep by putting a tight leash on spend.

- **Quality Management**

If this arrow isn't already in your quiver, consider adding it as soon as possible. Knowing how to identify, obtain, and deliver the highest possible quality goods and services for every dollar spent not only benefits your entire organization, but helps support larger value-building goals set by procurement, finance, and upper management.

- **Time Management (Scheduling)**

It's not just what you do, but when you get it done. Projects are successful only if they hit benchmarks for time as well as quality and completion. Familiarize yourself with scheduling and time management tools to ensure you can create effective short- and long-term timelines for every stage of your project—and accommodate delays and other problems intelligently when they crop up.

- **Task Management**

You can't be everywhere at once, even if you wanted to be. Beyond creating task lists and monitor the progress of various contributing parties, you'll also need to be comfortable with delegation and strategic use of soft skills to motivate your team members to complete tasks with minimal guidance and set their own lists of sub-tasks (drawn from their respective areas of expertise) required to complete their assignments.

- **Versatile Negotiation Skills**

As project manager, you'll need effective contract management skills and a willingness to engage procurement, finance, legal, and other stakeholders in securing the goods and services necessary to complete your project. But negotiation isn't just about contracts and costs. You'll also need a savvy approach to dealing with interpersonal conflicts, shared access to limited resources within the company, and interdepartmental initiatives. Effective negotiation is the magic pixie dust that'll keep your

project in the air instead of crashing to the ground.

These core competencies, along with critical thinking and leadership, allow you to serve as the central pillar of the project, sharing your insights, guidance, and experience with others to help them develop these same important skills and, in turn, become more effective project managers themselves.

Familiarity with Project Management Tools

The effective project manager is well-versed in the latest tech and the right tools required to complete successful projects.

One of the most important is project management software, particularly if it's integrated with a complete and centralized solution that also connects your Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), procurement, and communication functions.

Automation simplifies essential tasks, while smart integration makes stakeholder management (including roles and responsibility assignment) much easier.

Communication is greatly improved, and with shared access to essential information, project sponsors are always in the loop, and your team can focus on completing targeted goals.

But simply *having* the tools isn't quite enough. Great project managers ensure their team members are thoroughly and accurately trained in not only the project management software, but the same essential skills that inform your behavior as the project manager, including critical thinking, smart time management, value-oriented quality and cost management, and prioritized task management.

Setting up a training program, and regularly refreshing your team's skills on critical tools, will help ensure they're always ready to apply their knowledge to the task at hand.

Great Project Managers Aren't Born—They're Made

As with any advanced, essential skill, project management involves sometimes bitter labor but eventually produces sweet fruit for those who stay the course.

By developing your core competencies and engaging your team with project management tools, proper training, and thoughtful and inspired leadership, you'll be well on your way to making your project manager skills a rewarding and powerful part of your company's success.

What's your goal today?

1. Use PLANERGY to manage purchasing and accounts payable

We've helped save billions of dollars for our clients through better spend management, process automation in purchasing and finance, and reducing financial risks. To discover how we can help grow your business:

- Read our case studies, client success stories, and testimonials.
- Visit our "Solutions" page to see the areas of your business we can help improve to see if we're a good fit for each other.
- Learn about us, and our long history of helping companies just like yours.

[Book a Live Demo](#)

2. Download our guide "Preparing Your AP Department For The Future"

Download a free copy of our guide to future proofing your accounts payable department. You'll also be subscribed to our email newsletter and notified about new articles or if have something interesting to share.

[download a free copy of our guide](#)

3. Learn best practices for purchasing, finance, and more

Browse hundreds of articles, containing an amazing number of useful tools, techniques, and best practices. Many readers tell us they would have paid consultants for the advice in these articles.

Related Posts