

Profile of a Successful Project Manager

Too often it is assumed that anyone with an engineering degree has the skills to be a successful project manager. If this is the case, why has one study found that only 28% of all projects were successful?¹ Where success is defined as, “*completed on time and on budget, with all of the features and functions originally specified.*”

Here is a list of the most identified skills associated with a successful project manager.

1. **Business skill** or business acumen has been identified as the most important trait a project manager can possess. Too often the project manager will understand their own narrow operational or technical requirements, but lack knowledge or understanding of how those requirements fit into the overall business.
2. Having said that, **technical skills** are an important skill to possess. A good grasp of technology improves critical communication and translation between the project team and the end-users. The project manager needs to be able to envision project components and how the parts incorporate into the whole.
3. It would seem very obvious that a project manager must have **project management skills**, but this is often not the case. Many companies are assigning a project manager to projects without the key skills needed to be a good project manager. Many of these key skills involve basic management proficiency such as good judgment, diplomacy, meeting management, high performing team dynamics and time management.
4. **Decision skills.** The ability to pass judgment on issues under consideration, and reach a firm decision is a vital skill for project management. Throughout the course of a project there are hundreds of decision points. A bad choice can lead to increased time and expense or outright failure. On the other hand, good choices can bring a project in on time and on budget. Projects need managers with good judgment and strong decision making skills to succeed.
5. Project managers must be able to clearly express and exchange thoughts and information. **Good communication** is the cornerstone of successful projects. Project managers should be encouraged to use the organization’s business dialect to keep communication simple and understandable to business-side management or sponsors. The project manager should use simple terminology, and avoid buzzwords and acronyms.
6. **Process skills.** Planning, enacting and tracking a series of activities, tasks, changes, or functions to arrive at a goal are other skills a project manager must maintain. As Henry Kissinger said, “*If you don't know where you are going, every road will get you nowhere.*” If you have good processes, plans and procedures, the chances of success increase significantly.
7. **Detail skills.** Project managers who have an eye for details as well as the whole will fair better than those that only have a grasp for the big picture. The big-picture-only view is for the executive stakeholder(s). The detail view and the big picture view are for the project manager.

Project managers, like other managers, often learn the hard way – from their experience in the trenches and hopefully from past mistakes. Why not add to that valuable experience a healthy dose of project management education. An investment in project management education combined with real life experience is the best partnership to ensuring greater project success in the future.

¹ Standish Group study