

6 Things To Look For In A Project Manager

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Harvard Business Review concisely defined a project manager's role by stating he/she, "...identifies the central problem to solve and determines, with input from the sponsor and stakeholders, how to tackle it: what the project's objectives and scope will be and which activities will deliver the desired results. He then plans and schedules tasks, oversees day-to-day execution, and monitors progress until he evaluates performance, brings the project to a close, and captures the lessons learned."

Essentially, the project manager is responsible for the successful delivery of a given project. Which is why in order to succeed, it's critical you have the right individuals fulfilling this role. The following are six things to look for in an effective project manager.

1. An Ability See the Big Picture. Whether the project manager comes from inside or outside of the organization, they have to understand the big-picture view of the project. They have to understand how every piece of the project works together. The project manager should be mentally building the project as the planning takes place, so that at the end of the planning session they understand better than anybody else in the room how everything fits together. While they may not have the technical skills to carry out each aspect of the project, they need to understand the larger purpose and goal in order to ask the right questions.

2. The Ability to Live in the Middle. The big-picture view is important, but a good project manager will understand the high-level implications of the project in addition to the gory details. They will live in the middle of both. Getting mired down in either the big picture or the detail-oriented point of view will get in the way of project success; you need someone who understands both perspectives. Every good project manager lives somewhere in the middle, able to communicate and work with both big-picture and detail-oriented team members.

3. True Leadership Skills. While many projects are technical in nature, excellent communication and “soft skills” are critical for project management success. Good project managers effectively communicate with all different types of personalities on a project in a range of settings and

circumstances. Good communicators are able to ask the right questions—questions that help the team lay out an effective plan for the project. In addition, previous facilitation experience or natural skills in the area is invaluable. Effective facilitation from a manager can guide, motivate, and support team members to be successful.

4. Fortitude to Get Things Back on Track. Not all projects run smoothly from start to finish. In fact, I often get parachuted into projects that are well underway but have derailed. When I say *derailed*, I mean that the projects are off schedule with no line of sight to get them back on track. You want someone who not only recognizes where things have gotten off track but understands getting back on track will take some maneuvering and patience.

5. Aren't Afraid to Say No. Good project managers know they need to be brutally honest at times. They know when the people calling for the project need to be told that their expectations are unrealistic. All too often, companies “overlaunch.” They launch project after project without giving any real thought to how much they already have on their plate, and they unrealistically hope everything will get done. And since project managers are usually afraid to say no to upper management, they say, “I’ll try” and end up failing. You want project managers who aren't afraid to communicate the facts and highlight reasonable concerns even when the truth is ugly or unpopular.

6. They Can Pull the Plug if Needed. In the same vein as the ability to say “no,” sometimes the most successful project is the one you don't do. Ending a project that one has invested a significant amount of time and

energy to is not easy, especially when it impacts a team of people who have contributed so much of their time and energy to the project. However, some projects should not be completed for any number of reasons. Effective project managers recognize this and are able to convince his or her team that their time is better spent accomplishing tasks for other projects with a higher likelihood of success.

The role of project manager is a critical aspect of a successfully completed project. Learn more about what it takes to be a project manager who gets the job done by listening to my [podcast](#), [The Conversation with Clinton M. Padgett](#).

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