

Project Success Method

Select a Skilled Leader



One of the most crucial decisions in the life of a project is the selection of the project manager or team leader. The right project manager boosts the confidence of the team and vastly increases the probability of project success.

A common error is to select an individual who has superior technical expertise but seriously lacks managerial skill and leadership ability. Such a person generally believes that a structured planning process involving the team is unnecessary. After all, they are the recognized expert, so they know what is required. They often work on the project activities to the extent that they end up doing work that should be done by other members of the team. Meanwhile, their project management responsibilities are ignored. They fail to communicate adequately with team members as well as with the project customer and sponsor. The typical result is frustration for everyone involved, including the project manager, who was so unfortunately and unwisely appointed.

To understand the type of person to look for as project manager, it is helpful to recognize the key roles and responsibilities of a project manager. If you were writing a job description for a project manager, you should definitely include the following:

- Ensure that project scope, objectives, and constraints are clearly defined and documented.
- Lead and facilitate the project team through an effective process for developing a comprehensive project plan, and build team commitment to the plan.
- Acquire the human and other resources needed to get the work done.
- Provide or obtain technical expertise/direction as required.
- Lead and facilitate the project team through a disciplined project control process to:
- Monitor project performance with respect to quality, time, and cost.
- Identify/solve problems and take corrective action as necessary.
- Clearly and concisely communicate project status on a regular basis to the project customer and sponsor.
- Manage conflict constructively.

To fulfill the above roles and responsibilities, you clearly need someone other than (or who is more than) a technical expert. You should be looking for the following personal traits and skills in the person you select as project manager:

- Recognized for integrity – professional and ethical behavior. Trusted by all involved.
- Self-confident, but not cocky. Action oriented.
- Willing to assume a leadership role, but not domineering.
- Understands the business implications, as well as the technical aspects, of the project.
- Has mastered and is committed to using structured, disciplined processes of project planning and control.
- Able to lead and facilitate a cross-functional team through the project planning and control processes. Builds commitment within the team.
- Outstanding communicator, both verbally and in writing.
- Effective negotiator. Persuasive.
- Personally organized. Disciplined work habits. Sets personal priorities appropriately and manages own time effectively.
- Analytical approach to planning and decision-making. Comfortable with computer-assisted management tools.
- Creative in problem-solving and encourages creativity in others.
- Attends to detail and follows up as required.
- Able to interface comfortably with both senior management and operational/technical personnel.
- Flexible and adaptable. Calm in a crisis.
- Excellent interpersonal skills as required for coaching, motivating, team building, and conflict/stress management.

After reviewing the above list of desirable personal traits and skills, you may have concluded that only a super-hero could adequately fulfill the role of project manager. Actually, that is not too much of an exaggeration. Truly effective project managers are hard to find. The good news, however, is that excellent project managers can be developed through training and on-the-job coaching.