



What to Demand from your Project Manager

The key skills and attributes all project managers
should possess

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Introduction

If you're part of a client organisation responsible for a capital project or a change management programme, you need project management to ensure that you get the right results, on time and within the agreed budget.

Good project management fosters efficient, collaborative working between the client, their advisers and contractors. This should be orchestrated by the project manager, who is responsible for planning and communicating what needs to be done, in which order and by whom.

In order to promote an understanding between all participants in a project, we have produced a series of booklets that describe how key elements of every project should be managed.

In this booklet, I have set out the attributes that a project manager needs to ensure that you get the right content on your project, at the right quality, on time and within budget. In this case, the most important thing for you to review is not only whether each member of the project management team is competent, but whether the team are a good blend and have the full range of skills between them.

I hope you find this booklet useful when you prepare to appoint a project manager.

Best wishes,



Paul Wilson

The importance of project management

When you entrust your project to a project manager, you are delegating significant responsibility. It is therefore right and proper that the person or company that you appoint is capable of delivering what you want without exposing you to risk or undue disruption.

A project entails bringing people together for a few months or years to achieve a set of specific goals and deliverables. You may have to appoint a number of firms or individuals to work together. The majority of them may not have worked together before (and may not do so again once your project is complete).

A good project manager does not sit back, watch things going wrong and report on it. They anticipate potential problems and take positive action before they become insurmountable. You need them to take the initiative and present you with clear advice.

If you want to have a first class project management service you need to choose your project manager carefully. It requires a considerable number of skills, processes and personal attributes to deliver a project.

The attributes of a good project manager

1. Goal orientation

Projects need clear goals and outputs. Your project manager must be able to help you create them and focus on them relentlessly.

2. Independence

It is important that project managers are independent of mind so that they feel able to challenge issues that may not be in the best interests of the project or will expose your organisation to undue risks, delays or additional costs.

3. Flexibility

If anything occurs on your project, you will want your project manager to understand the issue, assess the impact that it may have on the project goals and take action to mitigate any unwanted effects. The key thing here is to be quick and decisive.

4. Relevant experience

Most clients are aware of the need to appoint people who have had previous experience of similar projects for other clients. What few clients do, however, is to look more widely to see if there is any wider experience that can be applied to your project. Make sure that you question your prospective project manager as widely as possible, because the experience they have gained in different sectors could be very useful to your project.

5. Intelligent appreciation of all aspects of your project

Project managers have often been trained in another discipline before they specialised in project management. It is important that they do not just concentrate on their “base” discipline. For example, a project manager who trained as an architect must not focus on only the design, any more than a former quantity surveyor should focus solely on costs. Your project manager should treat all aspects of your project equally.

6. Excellent people management skills

The one over-riding skill that your project manager needs is excellent people management skills. After all, it is not really a project that they will be managing – it is people! This means that they need to be energetic, encouraging and well organised.

7. Leadership

In addition to excellent people management skills an additional quality is required – leadership. In these circumstances you need your project manager to be firm, decisive and respected by others. There is a considerable difference between management and leadership. You should make sure that your project manager has both attributes.

8. A systematic, logical approach

Your project manager must be capable of orchestrating a series of systematic, logical processes. It is imperative that they strike the right balance between the problem they are trying to solve and the management process they use to solve it.

9. Care and diligence

The first duty of a professional project manager is to protect the client organisation. Indeed, the wider definition of the word 'professional' is that the interests of the client are put before the interests of the project manager.

This means that they must ensure that the client is protected against any legal, financial and operational difficulties.

This simple objective means that the project manager needs to take a very wide view of your risks and interests and have systems and processes to protect you.

10. Strategic approach

Projects are full of medium to short term goals and deadlines. Under these conditions, it is easy to lose sight of the overall objectives of the project.

A good project manager thinks and acts strategically. This means that amongst all the detail they keep two things in mind:

- Where are we heading in the long term? (Rather than in the short to medium term).
- What is the big picture? (Rather than all the detail).

They should also make sure that you are kept aware of the need to keep zooming in and out of the detail. Sometimes your attention will be drawn to what is happening in 'the wood' and other times you will be looking at 'the trees'. This important attribute means that you will not be blown off course.

11. Planning ability

One of the primary skills of a project manager is to plan. This means breaking down the project into a series of activities carried out in the right order in the shortest possible (realistic) time.

At the end of this planning process, you will have a detailed programme that will be the basis for monitoring progress on your project.

12. Financial expertise

Your project manager must control, not just monitor costs, including:

- Making sure that cost estimates are accurate at the end of each stage from the brief onwards.
- Checking and benchmarking costs against similar projects.
- Organising cost checks during design and challenging designers.
- Ensuring that you do not make changes as clients that are not in the best interests of the finance of your projects.

Your project manager will know the difference between cost and value, which involves taking intelligent balanced decisions.

13. First class monitoring systems

Your project manager must have first class monitoring systems for the following:

- Health and safety – is this being taken seriously and are all procedures implemented in full throughout the project?
- Is the project on time?
- Is the project proceeding in accordance with the cash flow?
- Do the progress reports and rate of project expenditure show a consistent picture?

14. Attention to detail

Just as you should expect your project manager to be able to see the bigger picture, you should also make sure that they have an eye for detail.

It is in the minutiae that mistakes are made, and it is the job of your project manager to examine the detail of the project work provided by every other participant to try and reduce the margin for error and pick up problems early so that their effects can be mitigated.

15. Honesty and integrity

You have a right to be able to trust your project manager. They should do what is right for you as a client, and be prepared to do what is right without hesitation. The best project managers are open and transparent with you because they have nothing to hide.

16. Respect

Project managers have to deal with stakeholders inside and outside of your business. All that they say, write or do should be calm, measured and respectful. This creates a positive environment for working and communication; and a positive image of your business.

17. An ability to learn fast

Project managers do not need to be academically brilliant, but they do tend to have an ability to learn (and think) fast. Mistakes are not repeated and they actively seek to improve project delivery on every project.

18. Excellent communication skills

Project managers communicate well, whether by listening, writing or speaking. They have the ability to distil complex issues into a form that any person can follow and understand. You should enjoy reading the “story” of your project being delivered well.

19. Good with technology

You run your own business well by getting the best from the technology you have invested in. Project managers constantly seek out technology that saves time, improves process or reduces cost.

20. Efficient

Projects may be a ‘one-off’ or part of a larger delivery programme. Whichever it is, no one likes wasted time or effort. You can expect your project manager to work smartly and set this approach for the whole team to follow.

21. Public relations skill

Most projects have external stakeholders or interested parties who have power and influence over your project. You should have a project manager who can be effective in a public environment. They will be compelling and advocate the project in a non-threatening but positive way.

22. Excellent problem solving skills

Projects are generally great fun to be involved with, but they inevitably face challenges to be overcome. The best project managers have problem solving 'muscle memory'. When faced with a problem they remain calm, establish the facts, seek options, offer solutions and commit. They are rarely knocked off course.

23. Detailed knowledge of procurement methods

All projects require a detailed knowledge of the various types of procurement solutions. Unfortunately, it is rare that any given procurement method is perfect, so the project manager must understand where there are weaknesses, and then manage appropriately.

Project managers should be able to effectively explain and advise about complex procurement matters in a manner that a lay person can understand. Effectively communicating complex procurement options is a sign of an expert project manager.

24. Contract management skills

Contract management and administration is sometimes overlooked by clients once the big procurement decisions have been made. However, procurement can only be successful if the contract ultimately delivers. Your project manager will administer in a fair and disciplined manner, using the contract as and when needed. This will create certainty for you and your supply chain and ensure lasting partnering relationships.

25. Risk management skills

All projects have a degree of risk and it is the job of your project manager to help you to avoid them, manage them or transfer them. This is an area where experience really counts.

26. Treat your money as if it were their own

Your project manager should care for your money as if it were their own. That does not mean saying “No” to everything, but ensuring that you get great value for money.

27. Dispute resolution skills

Despite all our best efforts we sometimes end up in a relationship or situation with dispute or conflict. Project managers do not relish conflict, in fact they should do their best to anticipate and avoid it wherever possible; but neither are they scared of it. They remain calm, seek solutions and compromise when appropriate, because they understand that all issues are best resolved quickly and decisively.

About Provelio

In our experience, most organisations in both the public and private sectors have the same broad objectives, which are:

To deliver their core services and control their three biggest assets (and costs), which are people, buildings and technology

To achieve these objectives, it is sometimes necessary to carry out a capital project or a change management programme.

We provide professional management services to carry out such projects, ensuring that our clients can go through this transition phase as smoothly as possible, whilst being able to carry out 'business as usual'. These services include:

- Strategic Management
- Project Management
- Change Management
- Cost Reduction
- Procurement and Contract Management

We believe that management is not just about processes and best practice. It is about fostering good, motivational relationships between people. We therefore deliver management solutions with integrity, transparency, clarity and a constructive style.

You will find more details and a substantial number of downloadable guidance notes from our website:

www.provelio.com



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All projects have a project manager and the success of your project depends to a large extent on how they perform. The appointment of a project manager is therefore one of the first and most important decisions that you will make on your project.

If you know what service a project manager can and should provide, you are well on your way to making an appointment and being able to insist that you get the quality of service that you need.

In this booklet, Paul Wilson, the Managing Director of Provelio, sets out the things that you should demand from your project manager.

He identifies 27 attributes and skills that a first class project manager should have, which is a valuable checklist which you can use to ensure that your project is delivered expertly from inception to operation completion.

Paul's advice is drawn from his substantial experience in managing major capital projects for clients in the public and private sectors.