

1.6: The Project Manager's Role

Project Management Skills

Every project is unique, and most projects will encounter unexpected technical challenges. Each project management team is a group of individuals who need motivation and coordination. Planning is vital, but the ability to adapt to changes and work with people to overcome challenges is just as necessary. A project manager must master the skills that are necessary to be successful in this environment.

Operational Management Skills

Often the difference between the project that succeeds and the project that fails is the leadership of the project manager. The leadership skills needed by the successful project manager include all the skills needed by operations managers of organizations. These skills include:

- Good communication
- Team building
- Planning
- Expediting
- Motivating
- Change Management
- Organizational Political sensitivity

Project Management Skills

Because project managers generally operate in a project environment that is more time sensitive and goal driven, the successful project manager requires additional knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Albert Einsiedel (Einsiedel, 1987) discussed leader-sensitive projects and defined five characteristics of an effective project leader. These characteristics were chosen based on some assumptions about projects. These characteristics include the project environment, which is often a matrix organization that results in role ambiguity, role conflict, and role erosion. The project environment is often a fluid environment where decisions are made with little information. In this environment, the five characteristics of an effective project leader include the following:

- Credibility
- Creativity as a problem solver
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Flexibility in management style
- Effectiveness in communicating

Hans Thamhain (Thamhain, 1991) researched the training of project managers and, based on the finding, categorized project management into interpersonal, technical, and administrative skills:

- *Interpersonal skills.* These skills include providing direction, communicating, assisting with problem solving, and dealing effectively with people without having authority.
- *Technical expertise.* Technical knowledge gives the project manager the creditability to provide leadership on a technically based project, the ability to understand important aspects of the project, and the ability to communicate in the language of the technicians.
- *Administrative skills.* These skills include planning, organizing, and controlling the work.

Thamhain's work provides a taxonomy for better understanding the skills needed by project managers.

Traditionally, the project manager has been trained in skills such as developing and managing the project scope, estimating, scheduling, decision making, and team building. Although the level of skills needed by the project manager depends largely on the project profile, increasingly the people skills of the project manager are becoming more important. The skills to build a high-performing team, manage client expectations, and develop a clear vision of project success are the type of skills needed by project managers on more complex projects. "To say Joe is a good project manager except he lacks good people skills is like saying he's a good electrical engineer but doesn't really understand electricity" (Darnall, 1997).

Key Takeaways

- Project managers need the same skills as an operations manager, such as good communications, team building, planning, expediting, motivating, and political sensitivity.
- Project managers need additional skills in establishing credibility, creative problem solving, tolerance for ambiguity, flexible management, and very good people skills.

References

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