



The Ideal Project Manager Specification

By Richard Morreale

The following provides the ideal project manager specification including general requirements they must meet along with the 'Hard Skills', the 'Soft Skills', the attitudes and the behaviours that we should look for in our project managers.



General Requirements

Successful project management is a combination of approximately 20% hard skills and 80% soft skills. The hard skills relate to the actual processes, procedures, tools and techniques comprising planning, organising, monitoring and controlling, while the soft skills relate to the project managers attitudes and behaviours. In addition, I believe that a truly excellent project manager must become a master of paradox.

Overall, the project manager is responsible for delivery of the assigned project on schedule, within budget and meeting the expectations of the client. In addition, I believe that the project manager has a responsibility to provide a positive experience for the people working on his/her project team.

Hard Skills

An excellent project manager will have a deep understanding and ability to accomplish the following:

- Prepare a proper top-down, structured Project Plan comprising a Product Breakdown Structure, Work Breakdown Structure, Gantt Chart and Dependency Network. Plans should identify not only all of the products that will be delivered during the project but also all of the activities that will be required to be accomplished to deliver the products. The activities should be broken down into various levels with the lowest level to be monitored comprising 5 - 10 day activities. The plan should also identify the project budget broken down into the level of detail required to be managed by the project manager.
- Define the proper organisation, resource requirements, hard and soft skills required of the resources, etc. to deliver the project to which he/she has been assigned.
- Manage and monitor the project plan to ensure successful completion of the plan activities and delivery of the project on schedule.
- Manage and monitor the budget to ensure that the project is delivered within budget.
- Define the content/format of and prepare the various achievement reports to be distributed on an agreed timeframe.
- Establish, implement and manage processes and procedures covering configuration management, including Change Control, Risk & Issues Management, Documentation Management and Product Assurance.

- Establish and implement a team culture within his/her assigned project.

Soft Skills

The ideal project manager will also have what I like to call the 'Right Stuff'. The right stuff includes, among other things and in no particular order:

- Enthusiasm
- Passion
- Energy
- Commitment to excellence
- Commitment to success
- Sense of Humour
- The ability to motivate his/her team
- Self-motivation
- Excellent communication skills
- Good negotiation skills
- Honesty
- Openness
- Approachability
- Empathy

Masters of Paradox

In addition to the hard and soft skills identified above, the project manager needs to be a Master of Paradox.

They must have a big ego to have the confidence that they can deliver most anything, while at the same time they must have a small ego to enable them to give most of the credit for successful delivery to their team.

The project manager must be not only a manager but must also exhibit the skills of a leader. The leader establishes the direction in which the project should go while at the same time the manager identifies the steps that must be taken by the team members to go in that direction.


The manager must be able to handle the ambiguity that sometimes is inherent in a project and be able to live with it but at the same time search for perfection.

The manager must be able to handle the complexity of the project, and some projects are very complex, while at the same time be always searching for simplicity and making things clear.

The manager must be able to have the helicopter view and understand the big picture and how his/her project fits into the overall scheme of things. In addition, he/she must be able to get into the details, see the small picture, when required, and then be able to step back up to see big picture view.

The manager must be impatient and expect things to be done with a sense of urgency while at the same time understand that in some cases he/she must be patient in establishing the relationships that are required to run a successful project.

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