



Yes, Project Managers Need Leadership Skills!

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Yes – if you are a project manager you really need leadership skills! Today’s project managers must have leadership skills in order to effectively perform their roles in the organization and stand out from the crowd of other project managers. Something must make you distinct from the others – especially if you are currently job searching or worried about your job security given the economy.

While this has certainly always been the case; it is even more important today in an economy where project managers (PMs) are being asked to do more with less – reduced budgets for their projects, fewer resources available to work on the projects, and reduced timelines to get the products/services to market – in order to ensure their organizations remain competitive in a global economy.

Without a doubt, PMs who are not well-versed in technical skills (such as EVM¹, quantitative risk analysis or estimating activities) cannot perform their role effectively. And certainly, without a working knowledge of the PMBOK^{®2}, project managers will be unable to acquire their PMP^{®3}. Additionally, in a world where there are many people running around with the “project manager” title, a PMP[®] certification is one way to stand out from the crowd. However, that alone may not be enough. Strong project management technical skills and PMP[®] certification is not sufficient for those project managers aspiring to take on more responsibilities. Project managers cannot effectively compete with so many other certified project managers unless they have more than technical skills in their toolboxes. Project managers’ long-term success and potential for growth are limited if they do not possess the necessary critical skills. For example, how effective can PMs be in their roles if they do not possess teaming skills, are not effective at influencing others, cannot communicate or present effectively, or are unable to see the “big picture?” Realistically – they can’t be very effective.

Therefore, leadership skills are, without a doubt, a requirement for project managers. For example, it is difficult to lead global teams comprised of individuals with different personal goals/objectives and varied cultural backgrounds if you do not have essential leadership skills. Again, I can’t emphasize enough that technical skills is not sufficient - it is just not possible for project managers to get the job done solely with technical skills. To progress in the organization – you need to show strong leadership skills also.

A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK[®] Guide), 4th Edition (2008, Project Management Institute, <http://www.pmi.org>), in Appendix G, notes particular interpersonal skills that project managers must have in order to be effective in their role. They are:

- Leadership
- Team building
- Motivation
- Influencing
- Decision making
- Political and cultural awareness



- Communication
- Negotiation

And, other skills that are important for individuals leading project teams include:

- Coaching
- Conflict management
- Developing/motivating/inspiring others
- Time management/priority setting
- Problem solving
- Presentation skills
- Establishing goals/delegating

All of these interpersonal and leadership skills are needed so that project managers can effectively manage any size project they are leading. I am sure you can think of many others! Please use the Comment field below to add them to the list.

Project managers who can demonstrate competence in these skills increase the success of the projects they lead and demonstrate their value to the organization – above and beyond their ability to create a Work Breakdown Structure or a Risk Management Plan.

One project manager I have spoken with commented that his strength in understanding the big picture behind a project and conveying that vision to his project team and others in the organization led to him being involved in the decision-making process around which projects would be completed in a given year. Here is someone who obviously stood out to the executives as bringing value to an important strategic planning process.

Another project manager said her ability to problem solve effectively by really understanding the issues made her a valuable resource within the organization, not just on project teams. She was often called upon to address complex problems within the organization.

These skills noted above in addition to strategic leadership skills such as strategic planning and change management help project managers be viewed as key individuals within the organization – someone with the potential to move up through the ranks and take on a senior leadership role.



And let's not forget some other important skills to have, including:

- Ability to work with others
- Ability to think ahead – foresee potential issues, risks, etc.
- A sense of humor (often needed when times get tense and the workload seems impossible!)
- Ability to manage logistics
- Strong organizational skills

A project manager with a combination of strong project management technical skills and relevant leadership and other important skills will find him/herself in a position of strength within their organization and a valuable resource overall. These are the project managers you want to work with on projects and the individuals that the executive team looks to as high potentials within the organization.

Have we emphasized this point enough? If not, let me know – I can (as you know!) keep on going! Is it obvious that I am passionate about this need?

Are you one of these project managers? If not, how are you going to get there? Map out your personal plan for development.

Definitions

¹PMBOK® = Project Management Body of Knowledge. The PMBOK® is the sum of knowledge within the profession of project management. The PMBOK® Guide is the subset of the Project Management Body of Knowledge that is generally recognized as good practice. (Taken from PMBOK®, 4th Edition, Introduction)

²PMP® = Project Management Professional Certification. A PMP® is certified by the Project Management Institute (PMI®). (Taken from PMBOK®, 4th Edition)

³EVM = Earned Value Management is a methodology for integrating scope, schedule, and resources to measure project performance and progress. (Taken from PMBOK®, 4th Edition)