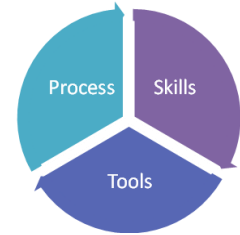


The 'Accidental' Project Manager

Have you ever found yourself given an 'opportunity' to be responsible for a project, but not a clue as to how to successfully manage it? Projects are being created everywhere – from implementing a new creative design, to launching a new product, to implementing a new organizational initiative – and they all are being called projects. Many of us who are given this opportunity just don't have much background in project management. We become 'accidental' project managers – responsible for all of the results of the project, but without many of the requisite skills to do the job successfully. Being an 'accidental' project manager can be a very frustrating and disempowering experience. Or, with a few learned basics – a process by which to manage the project process and results, the skills to manage the project and the people, and the tools to make the activities easier and more efficient – it can be an empowering and rewarding experience.



The process includes a plan by which the project manager can direct project activities. This includes breaking the project down into bit-sized chunks – either based on when the activities occur (phases of the project) or by groupings of similar types of activities or required skills (all of the sales activities or creative activities). Then, performance measures must be established for each piece of the project – including goals, due dates, who is responsible for executing the work, and any other activities that are impacted by this piece of the project. A project manager needs to understand the entire scope of work that must be done for a project and the impact(s) to the total project if one piece changes.

Two sets of skills are critical for the success of the project – the technical skills and the human skills. The technical skills, which can vary widely depending upon the type and size of the project, include understanding both the technology in the project and the cost and schedule management technology. The human skills, which are about the same despite the type and size of the project, include attracting and retaining a talented project team, gaining commitment to the project, and resolving conflict. The project team is the human representation of the project and the right composition of the team is critical. A good project team can produce trust and commitment from its customers, users, stakeholders, and operational colleagues. In recruiting, each individual's qualifications, skills, attitude, and commitment should all be considered. For example, a person who has great technical skills, but has poor communication and collaboration skills, should be considered only after careful thought as to the amount of time the project manager is willing to spend listening to complaints and refereeing between team members or with project customers. Projects mean change – and change always causes conflict. Therefore, team members should be recruited who have, or can develop, excellent communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills. Unresolved conflicts tie up personnel and their productivity, slowing down both the quality and the completion of the project resulting in higher costs. The solution is to train and prepare the project team to handle the people challenges as competently as the technical challenges.



Tools can make it easier and faster to execute project tasks, provide a standard methodology for activities, enhance communication, and minimize confusion. Typical tools include items like a project charter which serves as the base agreement document for what is included and not included in the project; a communication grid that outlines what information will be communicated to whom on what frequency; and a turnover plan that details how the project will be turned over to the individual(s) that will be responsible for it on an ongoing basis. Additional software tools may be used to assist with scheduling, schedule risk analysis, and cost analysis. All of these tools enable the project manager to document the decisions and the status of project activities during the implementation. When these tools are kept in a central, accessible location, they provide the project team, project customers, and stakeholders a single source of information – saving time and money.

Today's project manager, accidental or not, must understand the plan, the tools, and the skills necessary to successfully manage her/his project - from costs and schedules to conflict resolution and commitment. A well defined project management plan sets out a path that defines, creates, measures, and documents success. Using project management tools makes the process easier and leaves a trail of documentation regarding project decisions. A project manager with both technical and human skills is able to effectively manage both scope and people issues - saving time and money. With these basics, the project – big or small – can be delivered on time, on budget, and with excellence.

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