

## Feature

# The Art of Project Management

*Learn how to create a masterpiece*

The science of project management is actually not a science at all, it is an art. This is especially true when working as a consultant and moving from project to project. Not only do you have to become an expert on a specialized industry, you also have to be a psychologist, a social worker and a great communicator with each new client as you parachute yourself into an organization.

The ultimate purpose of a successful project manager should be to implement a management culture of performance and accountability. The common belief in the project management field is that once you have delivered on time and within budget, you have completed your mandate. This is a misconception and far from reality.

Successfully delivering a project involves more than time and money, it requires all of the following elements:

**Delivering on time:** In order to continuously deliver on time, you must have a strong plan. The plan becomes your bible. Unlike traditional plans, the Project Plan has to indicate and focus on each deliverable along the way. The focus should always be on the end product, concrete and clear to all. The most important aspect is the end product, not the activity to get there. Make sure that your plan has clear deliverables, specifying dates and who is responsible. You also should include the risks involved in the process of that execution. Every deliverable must have a backup plan. Delivering on time is also about committing each participant before the adoption of the plan. Everyone should understand that they are all on the same boat. They all have to buy in because if something goes wrong everyone sinks.

**Within budget:** The most important factor to deliver within budget is to have a solid budget from the start. Building the right budget requires extensive work. Estimates should be generated by checking various suppliers and researching benchmarks and best practices. Backup plans should be analyzed with their corresponding costs. If things don't go as planned and you find yourself over budget, a serious reconfiguration and re-evaluation of the functionality are required. The important objective is to deliver the functionality necessary that makes business sense. You may have to abandon superfluous elements of the project in order to stay within the budget.

**With the quality and functionality requested:** A key phase of project management is to clearly understand what is really expected from the project. In many situations clients are not capable of putting limits to their demands. If the problem is not properly understood, you could be designing state-of-the-art solutions unnecessarily. Make sure that before starting, everyone understands what the changes are that the project is bringing to the organization and keep those in mind as you move forward.

**Meeting the business objectives:** It is important to understand the context of the project. What is it that you really want to accomplish? What is the benefit to the organization? Projects can't be seen as isolated islands. Questioning senior management is needed to have the understanding of the ultimate objective so that you can make the right decision when encountering difficulties during execution.



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***With the satisfaction of the client and the team:*** A truly successful project requires the complete satisfaction of the various stakeholders from the management to every participant on the team. It is not good enough to have delivered on time, within budget and with the quality and functionality required if along the way you have exhausted the team, upset the board or made enemies in the organization. Obtaining the commitment and full support of each participant is most important.

***Undertaking a final evaluation:*** Finally, a project is not completed until you have systematically reviewed the results and the process. What went wrong? What was done right? What can be improved for your next experience? Getting feedback from management, your client and the team also helps your learning curve.

Once you have clarity in what defines success in Project Management, keep these tips in mind.

- Define deliverables/end products.
- Get the commitment/support of each participant from the start.
- Make sure everyone understands who is responsible for each deliverable.
- Implant a culture of accountability: "I'm on it".
- Make the team review the plan periodically or as often as needed.
- Work from the deadline backwards.
- Analyze other options for critical paths and have them ready.
- Continuously question the values of the project to ensure they are in line with business objectives.
- Don't forget the final evaluation.

Though few companies are managed by projects, once you understand the benefits of this methodology, you realize that every activity can be broken down into end products. If you have clear definitions of the end results that your organization should deliver, you will make every employee responsible and accountable for them. A project-based organization is based on performance.

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