



Project Management for Development Organizations

Doing the Right Projects,
Doing the Projects Right

Managerial Skills of Project Managers

The evolution of development projects has changed the skills required of project managers. Not long ago, the emphasis was placed on technical skills, and project managers were hired based on their experience and proficiency in the project's technical areas. Starting in the late 90s, the nature of development projects changed considerably; projects are not just one-dimensional approaches focused on a single solution. Development projects now use multi-sectorial solutions that include different approaches that require increased participation by stakeholders and complex partnership strategies.

In today's projects, soft skills are becoming equally as important as technical or hard skills. To be an effective project manager today requires a good understanding of general management. Projects are becoming more complex in their nature, and it is no longer possible for the project manager to remain a technical expert. Project managers need to spend more of their time planning, organizing, directing, and monitoring the project.

The project manager must maintain a general perspective and avoid micro-managing, concentrating instead on managing the project, letting the project team members perform the technical work, limiting their technical involvement to evaluating the work of the team, evaluating project progress, developing alternatives, and making decisions to correct deviations from plans.

Project management is both a science and an art. It's a science because it requires the analysis of charts, graphs and financial data, and an art because it deals with negotiations, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, and organizational factors. In order to perform the functions of management and to assume multiple roles, project managers must be skilled in both the science and the art of project management.

There are four skills essential to successful management:

- **Analytical skills**, to develop and use management processes and techniques.
- **Problem-solving skills**, to identify root causes and develop solutions.
- **Negotiating skills**, to reach agreements with stakeholders.
- **Conceptual skills**, to interpret abstract information.

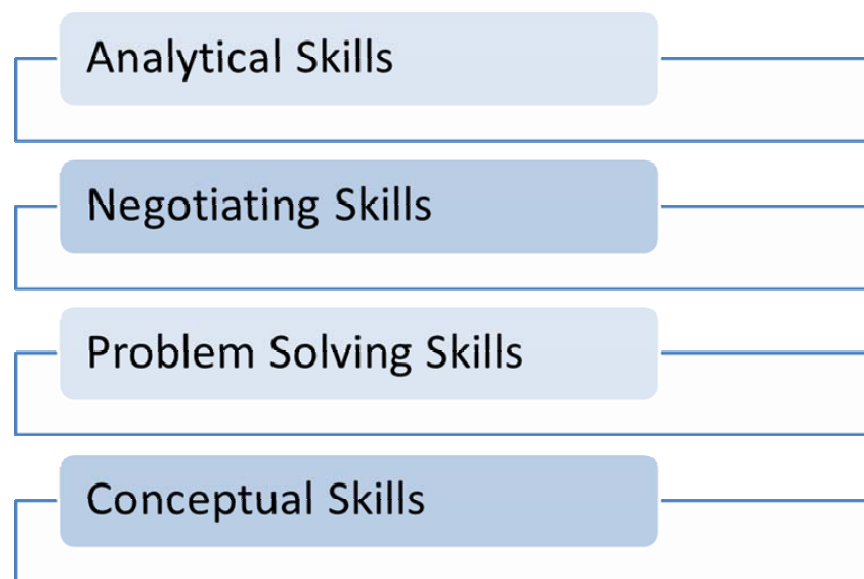


Figure 33 - Project Management Skills

Analytical Skills

The project manager must have the skills to use management techniques, procedures and tools to solve complex problems and make rational decisions that are based on available information. The project manager must know how to interpret a budget report, how to read the statistical analysis of a project baseline data, and understand the correct application of the different management methodologies. Furthermore, the project manager is expected to effectively use information and communication technologies to be more effective.

Analytical skills include the ability to apply logical thinking to gather and analyze information, design and test solutions to problems, and formulate action plans. The skills require the ability to work with management processes and tools using specialized knowledge and experience to make decisions. These skills are necessary to communicate concepts and ideas effectively with the project team, assess risks, and make trade-offs between cost, schedule, time, and quality issues.

Negotiation Skills

Project managers spend a large portion of their time negotiating for resources, and if they do not have strong negotiating skills, their chances of being successful are greatly reduced. A large part of the time spent negotiating takes place within the organization; negotiating to get the resources the project needs, resources that in most cases are being requested by other project managers, such as support from Finance, IT, Procurement, etc.

Negotiation is the process of obtaining mutually acceptable agreements with individuals or groups. Depending on the project, the structure and the level of authorization, the project manager has the responsibility to negotiate on behalf of the organization to obtain the best value. In other cases, negotiation includes trade-offs when stakeholders request changes or modifications to the project and its resources. When dealing with vendors or consultants who are bidding for a specific good or service, the assistance of specialized staff, such as representatives from the legal or the procurement department may also be required.

Negotiation skills are also useful when dealing with project beneficiaries and building agreements that will benefit both the project and the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries may have other priorities, and they may not be highly motivated to participate in the project activities. The project manager must be able to find the best approach to persuade the group

by building a common understanding of its benefits and aligning the interest of the beneficiaries with those of the project.

Problem-Solving Skills

All projects are prone to encounter problems that were not identified in early stages. Problems must be understood before the team jumps to find solutions. In many cases, the original problem is a symptom of a larger problem; failure to make this distinction may lead to the implementation of a solution that will not solve the problem at its root cause.

Problem-solving skills offer different techniques that the project manager can use to address problems which might otherwise be excessively complex. Techniques such as breaking problems down into manageable parts, identifying root causes of problems, and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are excellent strategies to solve problems.

Additionally, synthesis and analysis-thinking skills allow a project manager to synthesize and collect dispersed information and turn it into a meaningful whole. A project manager must also be able to see patterns and derive meaningful conclusions from distinct pieces of data.

Conceptual Skills

Conceptual skills include the ability to coordinate and integrate the entire project's efforts; they require that the project manager sees the project as a whole and not just the sum of its parts. The project manager needs the ability to understand how all the elements of the project make a whole, and how they all relate and depend on one another. This is an ability to anticipate how a change in one part of the project will affect the entire project. The bigger and more complex the project, the larger is the need for this type of skill. This skill helps the project manager keep a clear vision of the ultimate goal of the project while understanding its relationships with and dependencies on the project's environment.

Project managers with good conceptual skills are well aware of how various elements of the project environment or ecosystem interrelate and influence one another. They understand relationships between projects, the development organization, the donor organization, the beneficiaries and the environment, and how changes in one part of the environment

affect the project. Conceptual skills are necessary to appropriately deal with project politics and acquire adequate support from top management.

These series of articles focuses on concepts and practices related to development projects. It is our hope that the ideas and methodologies presented here prove useful to anyone who is engaged in managing projects in the broader development community, and helps bring sustainable benefits to the communities and beneficiaries who need it the most. Visit our website for more information on how you can build your project management skills.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) aim by 2030 to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.

PM4DEV is committed to provide resources and develop knowledge and expertise to support development organizations in their efforts to achieve these ambitious goals.



Project Management
For Development Organiza-
tions

www.pm4dev.com
info@pm4dev.com