

## What to look for when recruiting a project manager

Although it isn't possible to provide one single definition of what a good project manager looks like, certain traits, skills and attributes seem to be advantageous for a person who is to lead a project.

Essentially, the job of a project manager is to take on a customer's big picture vision and to turn that vision into reality within certain time, budget and quality constraints.

In order to do that, the project manager needs to spend a considerable amount of time and effort liaising with the customer or end users, understanding the vision, planning the project and managing the team in a controlled manner. The project manager must keep scope, quality, risks, issues and budget under control and will also have to provide leadership and direction to the team and liaise with the project's stakeholders. All of this requires thoughtful consideration and a great deal of skill.

The project manager is the central point of coordination and communication; one minute focusing on detailed tasks; the next liaising with the customer and providing inspiration and a big picture vision for the team to follow.

A good project manager must therefore be a proficient communicator and have a natural ability for organising events, building relationships and making things happen. He or she must have attention to detail and have the ability to lead and focus the team on the end goal.

A good project manager will be proactive rather than reactive and will seek to uncover risks before they turn into issues. He will never assume, but constantly ask if he has proof that something is working well. For instance; how do I know that my team is motivated and fully embraces the objectives of the project? How do I know that what we are developing is what the users want and need? How do I know that risks are being effectively identified and mitigated?

A great project manager will be honest and approachable and focus on people as much as on tasks. He knows that he cannot manage a project from behind his desk. He will work with people, get his hands dirty and build strong relationships with team members, the customer, end users and other stakeholders.

A great project manager knows when to support and guide others, and when to challenge and hold others to account. In addition, he will be able to manage his own state of mind and have sufficient self-discipline and personal insight to set an excellent example for others to follow.

In other words, an excellent project manager is so much more than a person who has sufficient knowledge and ability to make effective use of tools and processes. It is someone who has the right amount of drive, attitude and confidence to mobilise others to get the project over the finishing line.

### **Determine high level needs**

Providing a generic set of traits, skills and attributes which characterise a great project manager is one thing; but providing a view of what the *ideal* project manager looks like is quite another - and with good reason! Every situation and project is different, and the type of project manager required for each project will vary as a result. Nor surprisingly, successful project managers come in many guises.

Some projects need a manager who is very technical or who knows a lot about the client's business area. Others require a manager who is good at organising a large undertaking and implementing generic systems and controls.

The key to finding the right project manager for any department or project is to first and foremost understand what the specific needs are and what the company is looking for.

#### **Step 1 ...**

- Visualise the type of project that needs to be managed and imagine the project manager doing their daily job. What is the project manager doing and how is he or she behaving towards the team and the stakeholders? How is the project manager dealing with risks and issues and with interpersonal conflict? Write down what you see, feel and hear.
- To help you narrow down your requirements further, ask yourself the following;
  - Is this a smaller technical project or a large complex business project?
  - Does the project have few or many difficult stakeholders to manage?
  - Is the project's domain straightforward or does it require specific knowledge?
  - How important is the ability to manage tasks as opposed to people?
  - Is the project team already in place or would the project manager need to build it from scratch?
  - Has the project already been kicked off or would the project manager have to scope it and initiate it?
  - Does the role require the project mgr to have line management responsibilities?
  - Is a PMO in place to support the project manager with best practices, financial reporting etc. or does the project manager need to be able to set the standards?
  - Which type of personality does the project manager need to be in order to best complement the existing team?
  - Is it essential that the project manager has a lot of energy and drive to lead and motivate others?

### Determine detailed benchmark

Once the company has a broad understanding of the kind of project manager they want to hire, the next step is to narrow down the description by creating a benchmark of the skills, knowledge and attributes they need.

Although one candidate may not tick all the boxes, the likelihood of finding someone great, is much higher the clearer the company is about what they are looking for.

#### Step 2 ...

- Read through each of the abilities listed in the table below and determine the capability level, which you would like the candidate to have. Allocate a desired score between 1 and 10 to each ability.
- Refine the description you wrote in step 1 to get a better view of the person you are looking for and what his or her key skills and abilities are.

| <b>CANDIDATE'S SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITY TO;</b>      | <b>Ideal score</b><br>Out of 10 | <b>Actual score</b><br>Out of 10 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Understand the business domain and end user's needs                   |                                 |                                  |
| Understand technology and software development methodologies          |                                 |                                  |
| Understand agile principles and run an agile team                     |                                 |                                  |
| Understand end to end project lifecycle                               |                                 |                                  |
| Understand PMP/ PRINCE2 and project management best practices         |                                 |                                  |
| Understand how to gather, document and verify requirements            |                                 |                                  |
| Understand how to test and assure quality of end deliverables         |                                 |                                  |
| Serve the customer and focus on business benefits                     |                                 |                                  |
| Effectively initiate a project and secure buy in from all parties     |                                 |                                  |
| Set up an effective governance process                                |                                 |                                  |
| Estimate, plan and track project activities                           |                                 |                                  |
| Budget, track and control expenditure                                 |                                 |                                  |
| Produce honest and regular project reporting                          |                                 |                                  |
| Be proactive in the identification and resolution of risks and issues |                                 |                                  |

## What to look for when recruiting a good project manager

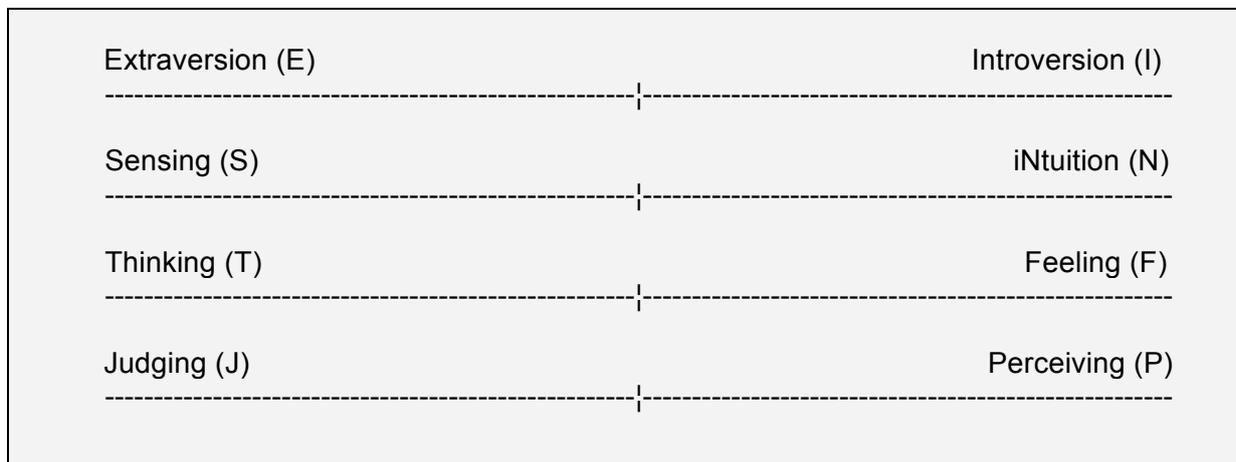
|                                                                   |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| Formally identify, analyse and control change requests            |  |  |
| Clearly communicate project vision and priorities to team         |  |  |
| Grow team members with potential and build a high performing team |  |  |
| Inspire, motivate and provide focus and direction to team         |  |  |
| Actively listen and seek feedback from team and stakeholders      |  |  |
| Empathise and build strong relationships with customer and users  |  |  |
| Value own contributions and say no to demanding stakeholders      |  |  |
| Stay calm in stressful and challenging situations                 |  |  |
| Effectively manage interpersonal conflict                         |  |  |
| Maintain a positive mental attitude                               |  |  |
| Be pro-active rather than reactive                                |  |  |
| Challenge and hold others accountable                             |  |  |
| Deal with root causes rather than firefight symptoms              |  |  |
| Delegate and manage own time effectively                          |  |  |
| Communicate effectively and with impact                           |  |  |
| Make effective and timely decisions                               |  |  |
| Act with integrity and take personal responsibility               |  |  |
| Set a good example for others to follow                           |  |  |
| Other...                                                          |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                      |  |  |

### Determine the personality type

In addition to the above steps, the interviewer can gain further insight about the candidate by considering their personality type. Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is an assessment tool, which isn't normally used in recruitment. We can however draw from the tool in order to assess if the project manager's personality type matches what the company is looking for.

MBTI measures a person's *preferences* for how they focus their energy, how they relate to the world, how they make decisions and how they organise themselves. MBTI measures this on the four following axes;

1. **Extraversion vs. Introversion** (how people prefer to focus their energy)
2. **Sensing vs. iNtuition** (How people prefer to gather information)
3. **Thinking vs. Feeling** (how people prefer to make decisions)
4. **Judging vs. Perceiving** (how people prefer to organise themselves)



### **Extraversion vs. introversion in project management**

Managers with a preference for extraversion get energised by interacting with others and will enjoy being around and communicating with other people. They tend to be expressive and action oriented and would potentially enjoy a high profile leadership role.

Managers with a preference for introversion prefer to take a less prominent role as they tend to get energised by reflection and time with their thoughts. They are more contained and may prefer to let others on the team take the spotlight while they organise and direct behind the scenes.

To find out if your candidate has a preference for introversion or extroversion, ask questions such as;

- How do you tend to solve problems and become clear about a complex issue? (would the person talk it through or think about it quietly)
- How would it be if you couldn't talk it through with anybody *or*
- How would it be if you couldn't get any quiet time to think things through?
- How would you feel about being the central person of a project, having to constantly liaise and communicate with everyone?

### **Sensing vs. intuition in project management**

Managers with a sensing preference will approach the world and gather information in a very pragmatic and tangible manner, working step by step to solve real-world problems and deliver measurable and concrete solutions and projects. They are realistic and observant and tend to look at the detail before they consider the big picture. They will be very good at providing concrete direction to others.

Managers with a preference for intuition are theoretical and imaginative and tend to focus on the big picture before the detail. They are good at creating a vision for the team and seeing

interdependencies between various streams and aspects of the project. They tend to be future focused and are good at conceptualising ideas and solutions.

To find out if your candidate has a preference for sensing or intuition, ask questions such as;

- When planning a project or dealing with an issue, where is your preferred starting point; big picture or specific detail first?
- How do you tend to lead and motivate team members; by giving detailed direction or by painting a picture of end goal?
- Do you prefer to deal with the detail of the project or with the bigger picture vision and strategy?

### **Thinking vs. feeling in project management**

Managers with a thinking preference are good at making decisions based on objectivity, logic and rational thinking. They are often viewed as firm but fair managers who lead in an orderly and sequential manner.

Managers with a feeling preference will predominantly make decisions based on personal values and have a strong awareness of others' point of view. They will be known as a people-person and are good at empathising with people around them.

To find out if your candidate has a preference for thinking or feeling, ask questions such as;

- How do you go about making big decisions? (does the person use logic and objective criteria or more subjective gut feelings)
- When you last experienced a situation of conflict, what did you do? (was the person unemotional and focused on facts and figures or did he empathise and see it from all sides)
- How would you go about motivating team members? (would the person provide objective and rational reasons or tap into the other person's emotional and individual drivers)

### **Judging vs. perceiving in project management**

Managers with a judging preference tend to be very organised and timely. They will often put work before play and will be good at creating timelines and plans and bringing projects to closure in a timely manner.

Managers with a perceiving preference are more flexible in their approach and comfortable in an unstructured or changing workplace. In managing the team they tend to give people a great deal of latitude and autonomy.

To find out if your candidate has a judging or perceiving preference, ask questions such as;

- How do you work to deadlines and how do you work if there are no deadlines?
- How would you prefer to delegate a task? Agree up front when it should be delivered or let them get on with it and see how it goes?
- If catching a long distance train, will you prefer to get to the station well in advance, just in time or will you get there when you are ready and then take the next available departure?

## What to look for when recruiting a good project manager

MBTI indicates how a person *prefers* to behave under normal circumstances, and recognises that most people are able to flex their behaviour depending on situation and circumstance. A manager with a strong preference for extroversion will for example be able to adjust her intensity and interaction levels to suit a more introverted team. But as this behaviour is not natural to her it could at some stage create conflict if the organisation consistently requires her to be less extroverted.

There is no right or wrong answer and no right or wrong MBTI style. There can be great diversity in personality of successful project managers. Having said that, it appears that many project managers in the western world tend to have an extroverted, sensing, thinking, judging personality type (ESTJ).

The purpose of the MBTI related questions is to gain further understanding of the candidate's personality and assess their suitability for a particular organisation and role. The key is for the organisation to know what they are looking for and seek to find a good match.

### Step 3 ...

- Determine which personality type would be the best match for your organisation and project. Indicate with a cross on each of the 4 axis below where you see the ideal candidate being located.

Extraversion (E)

Introversion (I)

-----|-----

Sensing (S)

iNtuition (N)

-----|-----

Thinking (T)

Feeling (F)

-----|-----

Judging (J)

Perceiving (P)

-----|-----

Steps 1-3 have been concerned with the preparatory steps of recruiting a good project manager. Only when the organisation knows exactly what kind of person it is looking for, should it attempt to carry out step 4 and do the actual interview.

#### Step 4 ...

- Carry out the selection and interviewing process as you normally would by listening to the candidate and asking open ended and probing questions about his or her background, experiences and abilities.
- Pay specific attention to those areas, which you have allocated an ideal score of 10 to by checking the candidate's abilities in these areas. A good way of doing that would be to ask hypothetical and behavioural questions such as;
  - "Which steps would you take if you were to start up a new project?"
  - "How would you go about estimating a project?"
  - "What would you do if the sponsor kept changing the project's scope?"
  - "What did you do on previous projects to keep team members motivated?"
  - "How did you react when the sponsor demanded that you deliver the project earlier?"
  - "Please give me an example of where you effectively managed conflict?"

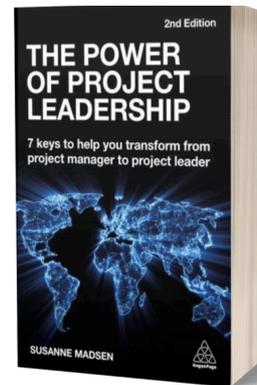


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Prior to setting up her own business, she worked for 17 years in the corporate sector leading large change programmes of up to \$30 million for organisations such as Standard Bank, Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase. She is a fully qualified Corporate and Executive coach, an NLP Practitioner, DISC accredited and a regular contributor to the Association for Project Management (APM).

Susanne specialises in helping managers improve their leadership skills so that they can gain control of their projects and fast-track their career. She does this through a combination of training, coaching, mentoring and consulting.

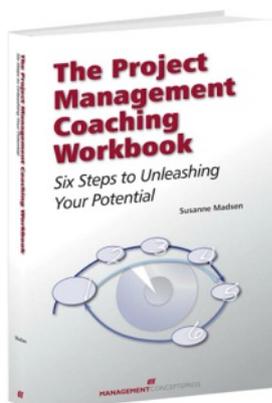
***"I loved this book the first time, and the revised edition is even better. Fully updated, this edition goes deep into strategies to help you lead yourself and your team more effectively. The book goes beyond theory - although you can tell the text is well-grounded in research - to give you practical tactics that you can use daily at work. When you combine powerful techniques and a willingness to do the work, you have a blend that will help you excel at delivering organisational strategy through projects. Susanne makes it easy by stepping you through the 'keys' to leadership, and you can pick and choose the approaches you think will make the most difference with your team."*** Elizabeth Harrin, The award-winning blogger behind GirlsGuideToPM.com



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