

Quick Guide: Project Management

Everybody does projects: whether it's simply going on holiday, developing a complicated new product or anywhere in-between. That doesn't necessarily mean we're particularly successful. Using some Project Management skills, tools and techniques can significantly increase your chances of not only achieving what you set out to achieve, but also making sure that it's more likely to be beneficial in the long run. So here are the **top ten tips** for improving your management of projects:

1. **Get help** - projects often require knowledge or skills we don't have. Find some people who do to help you.
2. **Listen to the stakeholders** – projects can involve or affect a lot of people. Find out their views, particularly about the long term benefits of doing the project.
3. **Set achievable and realistic objectives** – clarify what the project will deliver. Be confident it can be achieved by comparing what you need and what you've got. Be sure it should be done by comparing the benefits with the cost of doing it.
4. **Manage risks** - don't assume anything will go the way you expect it to. Identify what might get in the way and consider how likely and how damaging each is. Deal immediately with the ones which are high on both; deal with the ones which are high on one or the other by having a plan 'B'; don't worry about the rest.
5. **Identify all the things that need doing and put them in order** - list all the tasks that need to be done to achieve the project. Create a flow chart showing which tasks depend on which other tasks. This will help identify missing tasks, clarify how well each task must be done and show things that can be done in parallel.
6. **Estimate the time for each task** - consider the size and complexity of the task and how efficient the resources are to determine the 'effort' (people's time). Divide this by the number of people who will do it to determine the 'duration'. Increase the 'duration' if necessary to allow for any working time they won't spend on the task.
7. **Determine the overall time for the project** - add up the 'duration' of tasks on each distinct path from the beginning to the end of the project. The longest path is the 'duration' of the project. Allow for weekends and other non-working times to find the overall time. If this is longer than you've got, you can now identify a solution.
8. **Get commitment** - make sure that the people who want the project done, the people who will do it and the people who will pay for it are committed to it.
9. **Stay in control** - at regular intervals, check on the progress. If it's not as you planned, take action to get it back on track.
10. **Learn** - when the project is complete, look back over it to identify ideas for improving future projects.

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