

**MAKE IT
HAPPEN!**



Case Studies



Sorrel Gilbert, 26, Hampshire

Programme manager, Mercury Systems



What do I do?

I'm a programme manager working with RADAR computer systems for military air traffic control. I manage several projects, working closely with the managing director, finance manager, sales team and several engineers. It's my job to manage their workload and **prioritise** what they need to do in order to ensure the project runs smoothly. I've been in this role for three months now, and I'm the only PM in my team.



A day in the life

Monday is reporting day, so that's when I'd ensure the team know what's going on and customers are updated. In a typical week, I'd speak to customers as well as deal with the supply chain and ensure parts have been ordered and will arrive at the right time. I might also deal with some legal areas around imports, and also trying to understand where the engineers are, and using their **expertise** to plan ahead.



Rewards and challenges

What I love about my job is how much it varies. I have my finger on every bit of the company and I get a view of everything and I get to have a go at everything.

"You're the expert in project management, so people need to come to you to understand the budget and schedule."

Personally, the biggest challenge is confidence. As soon as I started my apprenticeship at 18, I was in charge and running a project with a budget of £2m. As a young person in that role, it's pretty scary telling people who are experts in their field what to do. But you're the expert in project management, so people need to come to you to understand the budget and schedule. In some ways, you're the coordinator. You know everything, and you're directing what they're doing too. You need to be **proactive** and make sure people are

doing things in the right order. Sometimes I have to pull engineers back to make sure they're doing what the customer has asked, and holding them back from doing too much.



Skills and attributes

You need to be **organised**. You need to be able to talk to anybody: customers, engineers, finance people, and they're all very different. You don't need any particular subjects, but it's important to be ready to be interested in whatever you're working on. Project management needs so many skills but you don't need to be an expert in anything.





My career route

I studied double maths and music, and had no idea what I wanted to do after school. When I was 18, I didn't want to go to university, I wanted to work. So, I went to work for the Girl Guides as an event assistant, and I also did a lot of agency work on events. I worked at the October Plenty festival at the Globe Theatre, sourcing costumes for the plays. I also worked at weddings and at a stately home planning historical re-enactments. Alongside that, I did a degree in maths with the Open University.

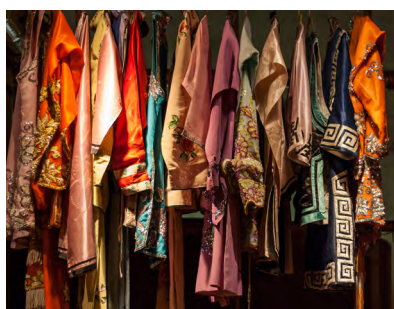
Then I applied for the BAE Project Management Apprentice Scheme, an APM-accredited five-year course. There's a **practical** element so you have to show you've managed a schedule, or managed budgets. There's also a written exam and you have to pass both parts.



Why project management?

It's a varied career, and not just over each week. Once you've done a few years in one industry, you can move to another and see another bit of the world. You get to see what you're producing as well, and you get to meet loads of different people.

There's also potential to **travel** - whether around the UK or abroad.



"Once you've done a few years in one industry, you can move to another and see another bit of the world."

A project can last anywhere from a year, to 20 years or more. In a longer life-cycle project you would just get to work on one phase, but in a shorter project you get to see the whole thing from start to finish. It's great to have experience of both, but I much

prefer working on shorter projects like I do in my current role. A previous project I worked on had a completion date of 2038 so you'd never get to see the finish!



Earning potential

A starting salary with a large company at the end of an accredited apprenticeship or graduate scheme would be around £30 to £35k.



Top tip

Don't get so busy organising other people that you forget to organise your own workload!

Advice for future PMs

Education isn't that useful if it's all you've had. You need to have some work **experience** to consolidate your academic knowledge. I'm quite severely dyslexic and I did much better in the written exams because of my work experience. I could just describe what I'd done at work.

During my apprenticeship I went to college one day a week and worked for the other four. That spreads it out and makes it much easier. Another good way to get started in project management is through finding projects to volunteer with.



Will Black, 40, Aberdeen

Project manager in Decommissioning, Spirit Energy

? What do I do?

I work for Spirit Energy, an oil and gas producer. As a project manager, I'm responsible for decommissioning oil and gas platforms once they reach the end of their lives by taking them away or making them safe. Spirit Energy has assets in the North Sea and Morecambe Bay as well as North West Europe. I run projects to ensure that the gas delivered to your hob or central heating is clean and meets required safety standards.

There are around 20 people in the project team that I directly manage. We also work with a team of experts who move the platforms, as many as 50 depending on the project. Once we physically begin the move there could be up to 200 people working on the off-shore vessels. Eventually, everyone interlinks to create the project team. The projects I'm involved with run from three to five years, with budgets ranging from £10m to £300m.

21 A day in the life

In reality, my job can be different every day. I'd usually have at least one meeting

where I'd update on the progress of the project, keep stakeholders informed and appraise sponsors. I'd also be making sure that all parts of the project are **going to plan**. There'd be some email correspondence and communications for the team and the whole business.

Once project activities are happening off-shore in a remote location, there would be daily calls to check on how things are progressing and ensure objectives are clear. Because it's a dangerous environment, I might visit the site at the start of a project and make sure that safety expectations are clear. Making sure that no one can get hurt is a priority.

🏆 Rewards and challenges

The best thing about my job is that it's very rare that two days are ever the same. Every day is different. Because there are so many moving parts, it's a challenge is to make sure they come together and work as one. It can seem impossible at first, but it's very **rewarding** when you manage this.

I'd say the biggest challenge

of being a PM is managing the kick-off of the project.

"It's rare that two days are ever the same."

Often there's a small group of people within the business who understand why the project needs to happen, but **you need to get buy in from everyone**. If they don't support you, the project won't move forward. If they understand what you're trying to do, then it's much easier.

⚙️ Skills and attributes

There are lots of processes involved in project management which is something that you can learn. That's all important, but it's **leadership skills** that really matter. You're the main focal point for a project and if people don't believe and trust in you, they won't work for you properly and become part of a functioning team. Often, you're working with a group of people from different parts of the organisation, so you need to be able to **create a strong team**, and make people look up to you and trust you.



My career route

I'm an engineer by trade, which is quite common in the oil and gas industry. I studied electronic and computer engineering and was initially working as part of a project as an engineer. I then took over more of the delivery side, which led to me taking on a PM role, so I morphed into project management. I always say I was a good engineer but a much better PM. Following competency assessments at work, I then took some qualifications with the **APM**. Even now, I'm training for a new qualification. **There are always new things you can learn.**



Why project management?

Being a PM is exciting and brings **new challenges**, and you can do something different every day. So many things can be project-managed. I've even found that you take it back to your daily life. If you're a person who likes routine and repetition, perhaps it's not for you, but if you enjoy variety, it's a great option.



Earning potential

In my industry, a PM can earn anywhere between £60,000 to £130,000.

Advice for future PMs

I always thought it would be important to get a degree before taking project management qualifications, but now there are so many more routes in. **Apprenticeships** used to be for people who wanted to use their hands, but that perception is changing, and they're a great way to get into project management. I'd say get involved in projects, whether small or large, then put that on your CV and use it to start getting involved in more projects at work.



Avin Mohabeer, 37, Cambridge

Agile project manager, Arm Holdings



? What do I do?

I'm known as the 'scrum master' and I'm responsible for leading the team at Arm Holdings who create the Intellectual Property for around 90% of the mobile chips in the world. They don't manufacture themselves, but instead licence out the Intellectual Property (IP), so it's an unconventional business model.

Within the company, I look after a product team that develop and maintain the HR system. This is a Reward Hub that manages the benefits for employees, including healthcare, pensions and more. My role is IT-based, so I'll **manage** changes to the website or payroll. It's my job to plan, design, develop and test the system.

I work in a team of around 10 people made up of business stakeholders, administrators, developers and testers as well as third party suppliers and consultants.

21 A day in the life

I spend the vast majority of my time looking at the pipeline

of work and seeing what's coming up in the next few weeks in terms of **planning** and development. I'd also be **troubleshooting** and looking at root cause analysis to find solutions to problems. We have a daily stand-up where we take 15 minutes as a team to check in and find out if there are any issues or blockers. I'll generally be monitoring against the plan to check everything is progressing well.

🏆 Rewards and challenges

The best thing is the variety of the role. No day is the same as the last. There are constantly new challenges and that's part of the fun.

The biggest challenge is getting access to people and resources. It can be hard to get buy in and commitment at the start. Sometimes there's resistance to change within an organisation. Another challenge is delivering to brief. Sometimes you might have to redo something if it doesn't meet the requirements of the brief.

⚙️ Skills and attributes

You need to be **goal-oriented** to hit targets and deadlines, and have resilience. It's important to have a grasp of the detail and bigger picture, so you need to be able to hover at 10,000 feet then hit the ground in moments.

"It's important to have a grasp of the detail and bigger picture, so you need to be able to hover at 10,000 feet then hit the ground in moments."

It's important to be person-oriented and you need to be a team player. **Leadership skills** are vital. The team looks to you in a crisis to navigate uncertainty. Plus, a can-do attitude is essential.



My career route

I studied business and IT at university and I had to deliver assignments and projects which opened my eyes to project management. I was working part time at a construction company, and landed a job as a project administrator out of uni. I enjoyed the variety. After that, I looked at certifications and took Prince2 and APM qualifications. I'm now an agile PM which is a particular methodology that's commonly used.



Why project management?

It's a great career for **stability** and is becoming regarded as a profession. Many organisations now tend to have a group of people specialising in project management.

Another reason is the **variety**. You can work on any project within an organisation, rather than just one narrow function. It broadens your horizons and gives you exposure to all parts of the business.

"I'm independent and my own boss"

I work as a contractor, which means that I'm self employed as a limited company and offer and sell my services. I'm hired for short to medium contracts, from three months to a year then I move on to the next. The pros are that I'm independent and my own boss. I also don't have responsibility to line manage people, although I do lead a team. However, the cons are there's no sick pay, no pension or holiday pay and you have to pay your taxes annually. It means you need to be good at managing your money.



Earning potential

As a contractor, I'm paid a day rate. In my industry, that can be anywhere between £500 to £700 a day for an experienced PM.

Advice for future PMs

Now there are lots more vocational courses as well as pure Project Management degrees. I wouldn't necessarily advise a PM degree, although it's an option. Instead, I'd recommend researching the industry you want to work in, whether that's IT, construction or something else. Then it's a good idea to research the different kinds of certifications from professional bodies like the APM.

My advice would be to stay in **education** for as long as you can. It gives you a good grounding for your career.



Huw Barker, 31, London

Management consulting manager, Accenture

? What do I do?

My role is entirely project based and every client can be different. I work on projects that run from anywhere between three weeks to three years. The type of project defines the role, whether that's **big technology** delivery or management consulting work. Depending on the client I'm working for, and what I'm doing, it can vary massively.

My last project was for a large insurance company working on a post-merger integration, to help them bring two companies together. The project was based around both technology and people. Usually, I tend to work on insurance projects, as I used to work in the sector, although I've also worked on Pharma and Life Sciences projects. Across Accenture, a PM could work on systems, it could be transformation programmes, or helping them define their digital strategy. There's a huge variety.

21 A day in the life

It really depends on what you're doing. A project with a longer life cycle tends to have more structure, but in a

shorter project, plans can go out the window at 10am. You have to be able to react quickly when that happens. Generally, there's lots of stakeholder management. You have to know what the client wants and be able to respond, and direct the team to make it happen.

"You have to be able to react quickly."

I work with a team of anywhere between one or two up to 50 people depending on the scale of the project. Usually, for me it's around three to eight people and they could be from different backgrounds, from business analysts, to solution architects.

🏆 Rewards and challenges

The best thing about being a PM is the challenge of having something quite defined to deliver and working towards that goal. To a degree, you're the master of how you do it. It's within your gift to move the team along the journey to the point at which you pull the trigger. It's a fluid and

fast-moving environment where everything can change in an instant.

As a PM, you're mostly around people. You need to be able to manage people in the right way and make their decisions effectively, and get them to move as one and in step.

The biggest challenge is the grenade that comes out of nowhere and blows everything apart. There are often ridiculously short deadlines so it can be a challenge to meet delivery points, but that all just adds to the **excitement**.

"It's a fluid and fast-moving environment where everything can change in an instant."

⚙️ Skills and attributes

The skills you need are relatively static. It's not like being a doctor where you learn new skills or become a specialist. The things you learn



early on in project management stand you in good stead. It's important to be organised and be able to define a plan. You have to be confident in **decision making**. That's what I'd call project management 101.

With experience, you gain people and **management skills**. That's critical to any project, whether it's client-facing or internal. You need to ensure that everyone is bought in and ready to accept change. You can create the perfect project plan, but if you don't effect change, then you won't ultimately have been successful.



My career route

At university, I studied business, finance and accounting and I knew I wanted to work in the financial industries. I joined a graduate scheme at an insurance company after university and landed in the motor operations team working on claims. After that, I naturally graduated towards project management and applied for a junior management role. I enjoyed the fast pace, being able to make change happen and being future

focused. At that time, I took APM qualifications. I joined Accenture three years ago, working on project management or helping to shape projects using my knowledge of the insurance industry.



Why project management?

In project management, there's no box you have to fit into. There's no one defined role or remit. It just depends on the type of industry you're in. Because there's no set job spec, it gives great scope for any company or industry. It's really about what you're trying to deliver rather than the role itself, so you can suit that to your own interests - whether that's architecture, construction, graphic design.

"There's no box you have to fit into. There's no one defined role or remit."

Variety is such a great thing. There's opportunity to get exposure to different areas. And you're never still. With

project management, you're **always learning**.

"You're never still. With project management, you're always learning."



Earning potential

Straight out of uni, a PM on a grad scheme could earn from £25k depending on the company. Once you get to programme director level, you could be earning a six-figure salary.

Advice for future PMs

Every company will have some kind of project going on, so find a way to get involved. You could join as a secondment to gain exposure to how projects work. That's how lots of people I know have got into project management.

There are lots of professional qualifications out there, although personally I think they work best coupled with a project role because you can apply the written element with the practical.