Common myths about project managers

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We have talked about the skills that project managers need to be successful in their role. Now, let's debunk some of the common myths about what is needed to be an effective project manager.

Myth: You have to be an expert in the field and have a lot of technical knowledge about the project.

Reality: There are benefits to the project manager *not* having a lot of technical knowledge about a project. Rather than getting caught up in the technical details when communicating with management and stakeholders, the project manager can look at all of the different pieces that the cross-functional team is working on and assess how they each contribute to the success of the project. As a project manager, you bring on the right team members—with their differing areas of expertise—and trust them to be able to focus on the technical aspects of the project. Your job is to handle the communication, documentation, and organization necessary to get the project successfully to the finish line.

Scenario: Jamar just landed his first project management job with a construction company. He's been tasked with managing the construction of a new elementary school in his city. He isn't expected to know how to do all of the technical skills, like engineering, construction, plumbing, and electrical; he hires the right people for the job. He communicates the needs, timelines, and expectations of the project to his team members and stakeholders and helps break down any barriers to completing the project on time. Jamar helps the engineers and construction workers communicate with one another to ensure that they are all on the same page regarding the requirements. He makes sure that the materials are in place as needed for the plumbers and electricians.

The bottom line: Project managers hire the experts and help put all the pieces of the project together. Project managers don't need to be experts in every field.

Myth: Only people with a lot of experience within an organization can manage projects successfully.

Reality: It is a common misconception that anyone who has significant experience and success in an organization can manage projects there. In order to successfully manage projects in any organization, you must acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, tools, and techniques and be able to apply them. You don't necessarily need to have worked in previous roles at that organization. In taking this certification, you are learning and practicing how to be an effective project manager before taking on a position.

Scenario: Sofia is a supervisor at a large customer service call center. She has been recognized by leadership as a top performer. To reward her, management has offered her the role of project manager for the implementation of a new call center software program. It will be her job to oversee the installation, training, and implementation of the new process. Sofia tries to manage the project, but she has no idea how to create a project plan, manage the various members of her team, identify risks, or handle any of the other major project management tasks. She lets her manager know that she does not have the appropriate training to manage the project but that she would like to build those skills. Sofia's manager enrolls her in a project management training course so that she will have the necessary skills to manage projects in the future.

The bottom line: To be a successful project manager at any organization—regardless of whether you have worked there previously—it is essential to master the skills, tools, and techniques of project management.
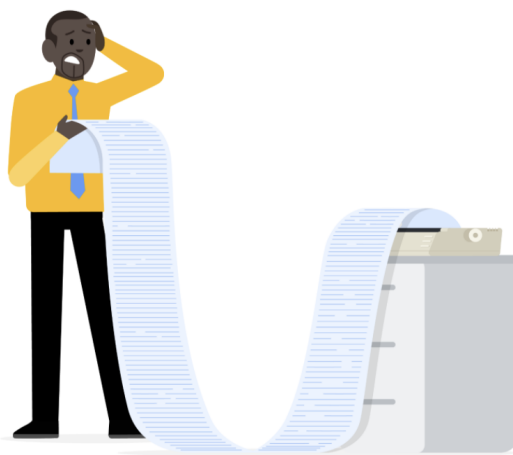
Myth: You have to know every single detail about the project at all times.

Reality: Details matter in project execution, but as a project manager, you must also focus on the big picture and strategy for the project. What is the end goal? Do you and your team have a clear direction? If the whole team understands their objectives and has what they need to be successful in their tasks, they can work on the individual details and

provide you space to supervise the overall project goals. Open lines of communication will help ensure that your team members share any possible risks to the budget or schedule with you.

Scenario: Yui is a project manager working for a clothing company. The company is developing a new line of winter sleepwear that is set to launch in late October. Yui meets with the key stakeholders to determine their goals and timeline for the project. She recruits employees from the merchandising, exports, marketing, materials, production, and quality control departments to be a part of the project team. Yui meets with her team at the start of the project to clarify the objectives for the product line and checks in with them regularly to remove any barriers and find out where they need additional support. When a team member from the materials department informs Yui that the fabric they were planning on using for a particular style of pajamas has increased in price, Yui works with the team member to find a new supplier so that the overall project budget is not impacted.

The bottom line: Your role as a project manager is to communicate with your stakeholders, clarify objectives, and set expectations. Trust your team to handle the details of each project task and communicate with you when there's an issue. Through your direct communication and strategic approach to problem-solving, you can provide solutions and help remove barriers for your team. This is where you add value!

We have just busted three project management myths! Recognizing these truths will help you be more confident and successful as you pursue your project manager career.