

Week 2 – Key Attributes

Peter What do you see as the key attributes of a successful project manager, Hao? What type of characteristics, what sort of person is unlikely to make a good project manager?

Hao It's a complicated question but I tend to take a simpler view on this one. In my opinion, to be good a project manager, you have to possess two sets of traits. One is what I call the "science" side. This has to deal with the processes: do you know your process, when to do what? The other is the "art" side. It's really to sense what's happening and to apply your knowledge, your know-how, to the process. So, one is what to do, the other is how you do it. And I see that most of the good project managers who have worked for me in the past have that very experienced art side of things; they execute it very well. So, in terms of the personal characteristics of a good project manager, I normally see two things. Number one is a very good people person. It may not be a person that will please everyone at that time but a very good communicator of what the expectation is; a very fair, very open-minded, willing to talk, willing to listen and willing to change, very skillful person. And the second area is very strong execution skills. You need to be able to execute the action plan. And if you're strong in that, with a very good personal communication side of things, those two go very well to make an excellent project manager.

Peter Thank you. Bruce, in the construction industry, what do you look for?

Bruce Well, you start off with some raw material, right? So you start off with young graduates, primarily technical graduates because they tend to gravitate to the construction industry, civil engineers, that kind of folks, right? So they have a certain technical competency that you start with. And then I think the answer is: it's about communication. And then there's some other soft skills as well. But it's ultimately about communication you have to have that core set of capabilities and then it's added upon.

Peter Thank you Bruce. And for you Helen, what makes a good project manager in your eyes?

Helen Well, everything that both of my colleagues have said I fully agree with, so I'll just add a few other comments. I think it is a bit of a science and an art as Hao was saying. I think there's the technical, the procedural execution part of the job that needs to clearly be there so it has to be someone who understands and who knows how to execute on that part. But on the softer skills, which I guess we've been focusing on, it's also about organizational skills. I don't think I've really heard that. But you have to be a very organized individual to pull all the things together that both Bruce and Hao said, either very large teams or stakeholders. You

have to have an organizational skill of how to do that.

The other notion that I'm putting on the table is what I call common sense. You need someone with common sense. Because you can have someone that follows a recipe, right and if the recipe says "do this, do this" they can do that but if they don't inject the common sense piece of it because something goes awry and they keep wanting to stick to the recipe, so to speak, and it goes back to what you were saying; (referring to Bruce) they have to be assertive but they have to know when to put in the common sense and know when to bend when you need to bend and know when to stand firm when you need to stand firm, and that's the art part I think you were referring to (looks to Hao). But common sense is what I look for in my project managers sort of to round them out, if you will.

And maybe the third point, in addition to what has been said as I said, is most of our project managers, I don't know how it is in the other industries, they have to manage without having the authority to manage these people. So a lot of people report in to the project managers because they have to help them execute their projects but really the project manager does not have direct reporting responsibility or authority over those people because they normally report into other individuals. So, the project manager has to get things done through other people because there's lots of people but not really having the real authority to make it happen, if you will. So, I think that's the art part as well. How to get someone to do something for you that they don't really have to because they are not reporting into you but they are just part of the project team. So, a real people person, communication, all the things that have been said but just thought I would throw in a few other things that I think help round out the individual.

Hao That's a great point. That's a great point about the ability to influence people and get things done as opposed to direct authority over them. And I've seen that again and again in a good trained project manager to have that ability to get things moving without having direct authority over them.

Helen That's a good word, influence, yes.