



PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Interview Guide

simpli|learn



Ace Your Interview

Senior executives and HR managers recognize project management as indispensable to business success. They know that skilled and credentialed **project managers** are among their most valuable resources. The Project Management Institute reports in a **survey** that in the U.S., over \$122 million gets wasted for every \$1 billion invested due to poor project performance. When it comes to hiring qualified project managers, things get a little tricky, and candidates are reviewed in several ways.

Will the candidate fit into the culture of the organization? Will the candidate

get along with other team members and lead them effectively? Will the candidate deliver on the project goals on time?

Getting through an interview successfully is both an art and a science. There are a lot of unknowns, but focusing on key areas or competencies and giving the right answers to the questions based on them in the interview helps you get selected. This interview guide will help you with 35+ project management interview questions and answers, based on ten areas or competencies that are tested by interviewers.

Scenario Based Questions

Q. How do you define an ideal project?

A: This question, being one of the most important **project management interview questions**, intends to know the type of projects you would like to take up. By answering this question honestly, you open up an opportunity to manage projects that excite you or those in which you can excel. Your answer should include multiple points such as whether you like to work as part of a team or alone, the kind of deadlines you prefer, whether you are interested in innovative and creative projects or not, and more.

Q. Work from home has become the new normal in the post-COVID-19-world. How well are you prepared to manage a remote team?

A: In the present world, project managers often choose their teams from a global workforce and are expected to manage teams remotely. You should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to work with team members virtually. It calls for a different management technique. Your answer to this **project management interview question** should clearly describe the project management methodology you may choose to manage people and resources in a remote environment.

Q. What is your strategy for prioritizing the tasks?

A: Regardless of its size and scope, prioritization is a critical concept that determines the success of the project and the timely completion of it. If your interviewer asks questions on prioritization, your answer should include how you distinguish between urgency and importance. You can say how you determine what is crucial and leave behind what is unnecessary. This **project management interview question** is also to test how flexible and adaptable you are while managing a project. Your answer should describe that you know when to say no during the project.

Q. What is the most desired skill that is required to become a successful project manager, according to your experience? Please give us a couple of examples regarding your past projects.

A: If you are experienced in project management, you might probably know that there is no single skill that is enough for a successful career in the field. To be a successful project manager, you should possess multiple skillsets like leadership skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, and time management skills, to name a few. To answer this question promptly, you should be able

to justify why you have chosen a particular skill. You can include a couple of examples to substantiate your answer.

Q. Tell us about the most challenging projects you have managed so far? What were the steps you have taken to tackle the challenges?

A: Here, the interview panel wants to know how you respond to critical challenges and deal with conflicting situations in a project. It would be best if you did not refer to examples where you had to manage tough team members or lack of support from management. As a project manager, you should be smart enough to handle such occurrences. Instead, focus on external factors like a situation where the project was unexpectedly called off, or funding was reduced in the middle of an extensive project. Also, you should explain how you tackled the challenges and managed the team during tough situations.

Q. Suppose the project has gone off the rails. What steps would you take to get it back on track?

A: Once you realize a project is not going as per the pre-planned time, budget, scope or goals, the next top priority is to get it back on the track. The project manager should be efficient enough to take the necessary steps to resolve the discrepancy between actual progress and planned progress. Your answer for this **project management interview question** may include re-adjusting resource management, finding the real cause of off-tracking, putting in extra effort, and more.

Q. Which was one of the biggest mistakes you have committed in your past projects? How has it impacted your approach to work?

A: To err is human, they say. It is how you deal with the errors that define your skills. By asking this **project management interview question**, the interviewer intends to check your honesty and whether you take the responsibility of mistakes you have made in your past projects. Rather than giving a 'no' for the answer, you can mention a couple of mistakes. Make sure you show that you take responsibility for the mistake as it is a way to reveal your maturity level. Also, you can explain how you had resolved it.

Q. Can you tell us an example of a failed project? Have you had any such experiences?

A: Success and failure are part of your career as a project manager. It is not wise to answer 'no' to this question as well. Instead, you can think of an event or phase in your previous projects where you have experienced failure. This **project management interview question** aims to check your experience in managing risk too. You need to include how you have handled the issue.

Q. Suppose the customer is not happy about the quality of the project outcomes. How do you handle the situation? What is your way of

handling an unhappy stakeholder?

- A: As a project manager, you will be answerable when the customers are unhappy about the project outcomes. While you answer this **project management interview question**, you should be able to reveal how much you value the customers and that you would accept their authority without being critical. You can say that you will try to make the necessary modifications that the customer is looking for. You can explain the steps you have taken to ensure regular interaction with the customer throughout the project. Also, you can say that you will communicate effectively to make the customer understand that the outcomes are within the scope of the project.

Q. What is your strategy to deal with internal conflicts among the team members?

- A: Here, the interviewer is trying to understand your mediation skills and how impartial you are while resolving conflicts. You can explain why there is a necessity to listen to both the parties and understand both perspectives. Your answer should include how you convince both the parties to come to a conclusion that works best for the project at hand and delivers a win-win situation. Also, it would help if you communicate how you ensure that both of them are not benefitting at the loss of the other.

Q. Define processes and process groups in a project management framework.

- A: This project management interview question aims to understand your domain knowledge. In a project management framework, processes refer to the defined way of doing tasks for completing the project successfully. On the other hand, process groups are a collection of processes that are carried out at various stages during the project. Initiation, Planning, Executing, Monitoring & Control and Closing are the five process groups.

Q. Can you explain the differences between risk and issues? Also, name a few types of risks you may encounter in a project.

- A: Risks refer to an uncertain event or situation in future that would bring a negative or positive impact on the project goals. Issues apply to any event or situation that currently impacts the project objectives. In other words, risk focuses on future events while issues are more of present occurrences. Issues are often considered negative, say a team member suddenly resigns from the organization. Risks would be either positive or negative. You can include a couple of examples to show the difference between issues and risks.

Q. Explain the concept of RAID in project management.

- A: As you know, RAID is a critical tool for any project manager. It stands for Risks, Actions, Issues and Decisions. To define it, RAID is a tool used by project managers to track risks, actions, issues and decisions in an organized way.

While answering the project management interview question, you should include the definitions of these four concepts as well.

Q. What are the techniques you may use to define the scope of a project?

A: With this question, the interview panel is trying to understand your knowledge in the concerned domain. You can explain these various concepts involved in defining the scope of the project that include – Product Breakdown, Requirement Analysis, Systems Engineering, Systems Analysis, Value Engineering, Value Analysis and Alternatives Analysis.

Q. Describe the team forming process you follow in project management.

A: A project manager should possess knowledge about the various stages that a team goes through during the project; hence, this is one of the common questions asked in interviews and exams on project management. Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning comprises the five development stages in team formation.

Domain Knowledge and Skills

A good project manager should have 2 features—experience, as well as an in-depth understanding of project management theories. While one without the other hinders performance, to be the ideal project manager, you must have a solid foundation in project management principles. The following question is often asked by interviewers to test the candidate's domain knowledge and skills:

Q. What are the three key challenges for our industry today, and how can these be tackled effectively?

A: This question will test your knowledge about the project management industry. Not only should you describe three relevant challenges, but possible solutions as well. Good examples can include challenges you've had personal experience with, along with effective solutions that you've used.

Think about the top challenges of the industry in which the organization operates. Your response will reveal your understanding of the industry, the market, current challenges, and possible solutions. This knowledge is critical to the success of any project manager, as you will be tackling these challenges inside the organization if you get hired.

Clear Communication

One of the essential skills for project managers is communication. Without this, everything else fails. Communication is the life and blood of any project.

It is claimed at **PMI® Research Conference** that about 90 percent of a project manager's time is spent communicating. In today's siloed organizations, communication happens between various groups and levels, including internal as well as external groups of stakeholders.

Q. What were the communication challenges on your last project?

A: As a project manager, you'll need to communicate with your team for all projects effectively. Communication challenges will arise; nobody expects that this won't happen. What the interviewer wants to see, however, is how you've handled these challenges in the past. It needs to be evident that even with communication issues, you were still able to work with your team effectively. For example, perhaps instead of being able to have face-to-face meetings when necessary, you were able to put together webchat meetings. Think of a time when something like this happened and how you dealt with the communication challenges efficiently to ensure that the project outcome was still a good one.

Q. What is your communication style with your team?

A: If your interviewer asks this, you'll want to assure him or her that you are an effective communicator who motivates others on your team. Not only should good project managers be encouraging when delegating to their team, but they should also be clear in their expectations. Make sure you point out that you understand the significance of being an effective communicator as a project manager.

While the first question helps the interviewer assess how effectively you can handle communication in challenging situations, the second question helps understand how you engage with others, whether you demonstrate good sense and judgment and are able to use language effectively.

Consistency and Integrity

Honesty and trustworthiness are of utmost importance in the world of business. Project managers manage critical responsibilities and resources such as material, money, and human resources. They also represent the organization to employees, customers, and vendors. They are role models for their team members. Any lack of consistency and integrity can cost the organization a lot more than money.

Q. How do you communicate bad news?

A: It's likely you've had to deliver bad news in the past as a project manager, and your interviewer wants to see how, exactly, you go about doing so. They want to see that you're considerate and upfront with everyone, that you have all of the facts first, and that you've thought about how this news will impact all of your team members—not just the person you're delivering the bad news to directly.

Q. How have you handled disgruntled employees?

A: The interviewer wants to see that you're a critical thinker and effective problem solver. Even if you don't have a specific example to talk about, explain that you always care about your team members and would want to uncover the root of the problem, and find out why, exactly, they're unhappy. While it may not be possible to please every disgruntled employee, the interviewer just wants to see that you would make an effort to rectify the situation and be professional about everything.

Q. What are some examples of times you've kept your promise even when that might have been difficult?

A: Think about a time when you reluctantly agreed to a challenging request, because as a project manager, you're expected to make things happen. Explain to the interviewer how you managed to juggle your tasks and effectively manage your time to ensure that you would be able to follow through with an ambiguous promise. Even though you may have had a lot on your plate, interviewers want to hear specific examples that show you were still successful in accommodating additional requests.

Customer Orientation

Project managers are responsible for understanding the needs of the customer and responding in a timely, efficient manner in ways that meet customer expectations. They are also responsible for establishing and maintaining effective relationships and gaining the trust and respect of customers. Here are a few questions that are usually asked to gauge the candidate's customer orientation:

Q. How do you ensure you and your team deliver or exceed customer expectations?

A: In a nutshell, the interviewer wants to see how, in detail, you're able to succeed as a project manager. After all, meeting (or exceeding) customer expectations when it comes to project delivery is your ultimate goal. It's important not to be vague and give a generalized answer; you'll want to give precise examples and details about your process.

Q. What are some best practices you've used to develop excellent customer relationships?

A: Current clients make the best repeat customers, and it's important to maintain excellent relationships, beyond just delivering them what they paid for. The person interviewing you wants to know you feel this way also, so as you explain the ways you've maintained excellent customer relationships, be sure to stress the importance of always having a very happy customer.

Developing Others

A project manager relies on the team to execute activities to achieve the desired results. It is crucial that a project manager can assess talent, contribute actively towards developing, mentor, and coach team members, and offer constructive feedback to them. Responses to the following questions will reveal if you are someone who can motivate the members of a team:

Q. How do you go about managing the performance of your team?

A: It's important to show that you have leadership skills when you answer this question. Be thorough about your daily tasks when it comes to managing your team's performance—for example, perhaps you hold weekly strategy discussions and meetings. You'll also want to provide specific examples of how your management style has resulted in positive team performance.

Q. How do you motivate team members?

A: It's crucial as a leader to not only ensure your team stays on the right track but also gets motivated about the projects they're working on. Maybe you give praise for a job well done as a form of motivation. As long as you can demonstrate past examples of how you've motivated team members, there's not a right or wrong answer here.

Q. What are some of the tools and resources you've used to develop your team?

A: This is your chance to show your knowledge on some of the many different technologies that project managers use these days. Be sure to name any software programs, online tools, and other things that you've used to complete your daily tasks. Be sure also to explain that you are always open and eager to learn new tools or programs.

Effective Delegation

One of the key success factors for a project manager is effective delegation. How effectively can you get work done through others? The delegation must happen through empowerment without interference or loss of control. The following questions will determine if you are good at delegating:

Q. What is your delegation style?

A: This is a question that is designed to ask about leadership skills. Explain what has been best for you and use examples of how your delegation style has worked well in the past. Even if you've never technically led a team before, it's

important to find an example of how you might've delegated in the past.

Q. How easily do you delegate responsibility?

A: Easily delegating responsibility is an essential quality of any project manager. Be sure to discuss a relevant example that assures the interviewer that delegating responsibility comes naturally to you.

Q. How do you monitor and review the delegated responsibilities?

A: As a project manager, it's important to routinely stay on top of your team members' tasks and responsibilities. Discuss how you do this with specific examples—whether it's by scheduling brief meetings, using project management software, and so on.

Goal Focus

Being focused on goals is essential for project managers. You need a clear focus to succeed. It is important for candidates to demonstrate the ability to align resources to achieve key objectives, to plan and identify ways to improve and achieve greater efficiency and to monitor and fine-tune execution with agility, hard work, perseverance, and good judgment. Key questions asked in this area are:

Q. What are your career and project goals for the next six months?

A: Be honest about any short-term project goals you have currently, as this shows the interviewer that you are enthusiastic about your projects and that you're goal-oriented. When it comes to discussing your career goals, be sure to include the company you're interviewing with as part of your goals. If you're interviewing with a recruiter for job placement, you may not have a specific company in mind, and that's okay—just be sure to be clear about what type of role you see yourself working in.

Q. How do you set goals for your team? And how do you track these goals?

A: Whether it's deadline goals or overall project goals, setting goals is an important part of being a project manager, as it motivates team members and helps to keep projects on track. Be sure to give specific examples that demonstrate how you've set goals for your team in the past and how you've tracked these goals. For instance, you might have set a project completion goal for a specific project that required everyone to complete their part by a certain date. Perhaps you regularly checked in with team members to see if any obstacles could stop them from meeting that deadline and if so, you offered possible solutions.

Managing Ambiguity and Risks

A project manager has to deal with uncertainty. It is important that you can identify and prioritize risks and take appropriate action in ambiguous situations. It is equally important to manage others' concerns in changing environments. To assess competency in this area, the following scenario-based questions are often asked:

Q. Describe two areas in your current project, where there is a high level of uncertainty. How do you tackle these uncertainties?

A: No project goes without a hitch, and people expect that. What your interviewer wants to see is how you handle anything that can result in a potential setback. An effective project manager should always have a few tricks up his or her sleeve.

Q. How do you control changes to your project?

A: Some level of change is inevitable, but as a project manager, it's important to adapt to those changes quickly. Explain to your interviewer how you continue to keep your team on track whenever any project changes pop up.

Prioritizing and Time Management

A project manager must tackle multiple tasks and issues. To be a successful project manager, you have to choose your battles wisely. Since resources are always limited, they need to be prioritized. Time is a valuable resource for the project because once lost; it cannot be recovered easily. As a result, Project time management is one of the key skills for any project manager. The following questions are asked to assess whether you are capable of taking up the responsibility for creating efficient ways to execute tasks:

Q. How do you ensure that your project is always on track?

A: Your interviewer wants to understand your work process and see that you're detail-oriented. Explain how you check in with your team throughout a project. For example, you may want to point out that you believe effective and regular communication is key to ensuring that a project stays on track.

Q. What tools do you use as a manager to plan your activities as well as that of your team?

A: From meetings to project management programs and everything in between, there's an endless list of tools and processes that project managers use to stay organized. Be sure to list as many tools as you can think of that you're familiar

with to demonstrate your knowledge of project management software and other tools.

Proactive Decision Making

A project manager needs to be able to identify and prevent issues from impacting the project adversely. It is important that the candidate demonstrates the ability to take proactive steps, avoid procrastination, and not shy away from making tough decisions. Thus, candidates are often asked to share examples and real-life scenarios from their projects and life where they made proactive decisions. Here are a few such questions:

Q. Give a few examples of proactive decision-making in your past projects and your life in general.

A: It's always important to take the initiative as a project manager, and your interviewer wants to see just how you do that. Think of specific project examples that include a lot of proactive decision-making, but don't also be afraid to include examples that don't include the workplace.

Q. Can you give me a few examples of a time when you made a tough decision, and it backfired?

A: This question is a tough one for candidates to handle as it tells the interviewer how honest you are with yourself and compels you to talk about an instance when you failed. Your interviewer wants to see how you handle setbacks because no matter how good you are at your job, they will happen. Most importantly, they want to know that you learned from these experiences. When you give your examples, explain how you used those setbacks to improve as a project manager overall.

GET AHEAD WITH SIMPLILEARN

The 11 areas mentioned above and the project management interview questions under them are not an exhaustive list. Nonetheless, the interview questions cover the most important project management skills and competencies that the candidate not only will be tested on during an interview but also will need to succeed as a project manager.

You can also hone your skills with Simplilearn's **project management certification training programs** that can help you acquire and build on these skills further, and prepare you to get beyond the interview and land



INDIA

Simplilearn Solutions Pvt Ltd.
53/1 C, Manoj Arcade, 24th Main,
Harlkunte
2nd Sector, HSR Layout
Bangalore: 560102
Call us at: 1800-212-7688

USA

Simplilearn Americas, Inc.
201 Spear Street, Suite 1100,
San Francisco, CA 94105
United States
Phone No: +1-844-532-7688