

Software Engineering Project Management Reflection

What?

Software Engineering Project Management stood out as one of the more distinctive modules in my MSc programme. What made it particularly unique was the absence of any coding in the summative assignments, something quite rare in a computer science programme. Instead, the focus shifted entirely towards analytical thinking, planning, and strategic decision-making. Taking on the role of a project manager, even if only temporarily, was a refreshing change of pace and, to my surprise, an experience I genuinely enjoyed. Before we deep dive into my journey, my e-portfolio is available [here](#).

This module involved fewer activities compared to others. I imagine this was due to the nature of the assessments, which revolved more around planning and critical thinking than hands-on technical work. The assignments were somewhat unfamiliar to me, as my background lies more on the software development side of things. Shifting into the mindset of a project manager, essentially stepping onto the other side of the table, felt a bit outside my comfort zone at first. However, as the weeks went on, I found myself adapting, and the process began to feel much more natural.

One of the most memorable aspects of the module was the emphasis on teamwork and collaboration. As someone who comes from a technical background, I've often noticed that many engineers lean towards introversion. Yet, the reality of the working world is

that collaboration is key. Our team dynamic during the project was particularly enriching; each member brought a different perspective, which helped shape a more well-rounded and thoughtful approach to project management. This experience also served as a timely reminder of just how crucial soft skills are in the field of engineering.

So What?

One of the more challenging aspects of Assignment 1 was making sense of the case study, which was set in the 1980s, and trying to identify the project requirements. Some of the requirements were vague, and others were missing altogether. Fortunately, my project team and I tackled this early on. As soon as Doug, our module tutor, assigned the groups, we jumped straight into collaboration. We worked closely on every part of the project plan, paying particular attention to the trickier elements like requirements gathering, cost estimation, and timeline.

It quickly became apparent that producing computer units within the budget outlined in the case study wasn't feasible. This meant making several assumptions to keep our proposal grounded in reality. Our next challenge came in the form of the word count, we had to fit our entire plan into just 1,000 words. We kept revisiting and refining the document, eventually choosing to highlight only the most essential points in the main report and moving the additional detail into the appendices.

In many ways, Assignment 1 set a solid foundation for Assignment 2. I've often found second assignments a bit tougher, mostly because they tend to be individual efforts.

The collaborative dynamic is something I really value, so tackling a solo project felt quite different. Assignment 2 involved preparing and delivering a presentation. Personally, I found Part 2 of the case study harder to interpret, and to add to the challenge, I don't have much experience with formal presentations. In my role as a software engineer, the closest I've come is feature demos, which are typically informal and directed at familiar audiences.

I saw it as an opportunity to brush up on my presentation skills, which I hadn't used in some time. I'm lucky to work with some inspiring professionals, so I drew on what I've seen from them, how they communicate, plan, and lead in difficult situations. Putting together the presentation deck and drafting a transcript was no small feat; it's something I hadn't done in years. However, I stuck to my strategy, using our work from Assignment 1 as a guide, which made the process a lot smoother. Although it felt unfamiliar at first, I gradually found my flow by focusing on the narrative and considering what the audience would need to hear. By the end, I was genuinely proud of how far I'd come, from initial uncertainty to delivering something I felt confident in.

Now What?

This module has truly broadened my perspective on what it takes to deliver successful software projects. I've developed a newfound appreciation for the role of a project manager. It's given me a clearer understanding of the many challenges they face and the range of skills required to navigate them with confidence. One of my biggest takeaways was realising how even seemingly minor decisions, like rushing a feature to

meet a deadline or delaying unit testing, can significantly affect a project's outcome. In comparison, writing the actual code can sometimes feel like the easy part.

The forum discussions were equally engaging and thought-provoking. I especially enjoyed the first discussion topic, where we explored three common reasons why projects fail, supported by real-world examples. Reading through my peers' responses was incredibly insightful; many of their examples echoed situations I've either encountered myself or witnessed in a professional setting. It was a powerful reminder that these challenges aren't isolated incidents. If they're not identified and addressed early on, they can have far-reaching consequences. These discussions reinforced the importance of learning from past mistakes and applying those lessons proactively to avoid repeating them.

Looking ahead, I'm keen to take what I've learnt and apply it to real-world projects with a greater sense of awareness and responsibility. I'll be more conscious of the broader context in which I work, recognising that it's not just about writing code, but also about understanding timelines, managing expectations, and contributing to a cohesive team effort. This module has really underlined the value of thoughtful planning, open communication, and risk management. I now understand that even small, everyday choices can shape the trajectory of an entire project, and I'm committed to making those decisions with care and intention.