

Managing Up

Project managers frequently interact with stakeholders who are in higher-level positions or hold influence over a project. In such cases, a project manager may need to manage up.

Objectives

After completing this reading, you will be able to:

- Define managing up.
- Identify common stakeholders project managers may need to manage up.
- Explore tips for managing up.
- Describe the benefits of managing up.

What is managing up?

Managing up refers to the process of building a productive working relationship with one's manager and senior stakeholders to achieve common goals and objectives. It involves proactively and strategically communicating with the reporting manager and senior stakeholders, anticipating their needs and priorities, and aligning one's work with their expectations.

Successful project managers understand that each role in a project plays a unique and important part in the project's success. To effectively manage up, it is important for project managers to understand the types of stakeholders that may need to be managed. Some of the most common roles that need managed up include:

Reporting manager

The reporting manager is one of the first stakeholders that a project manager will manage up. Helping the reporting manager in different ways to help improve their efficiency and efficacy is a good strategy.

Senior management

Senior management includes executives, department heads, and other senior leaders within the organization who hold decision-making authority over the project. As a project manager, helping senior managers understand how project objectives align with organizational goals and providing information can help them make more informed decisions.

Clients

Project managers may need to manage up client stakeholders who have contracted the organization for the project. Proactively communicating project progress, risks, and issues, helps avoid surprises and builds a trusting relationship with clients.

Vendors or Contractors

If the project involves working with external vendors or contractors, project managers may need to manage up vendors and contractors to ensure that they are meeting the organization's standards and contributing effectively to the project.

As a project manager, it is important to ensure that all these roles are working together effectively, and managing up is crucial to the project's success.

How to manage up

Managing up can feel uncomfortable at first. However, it is an important skill for a project manager. Here are some tips for effectively managing up.

Build a relationship

Building a positive relationship is key to managing up with managers or colleagues who hold influence over a project manager's work. The project manager must get to know them and their work style and establish a rapport based on trust and mutual respect.

Communicate effectively

Clear communication is crucial when managing up. The project manager must make sure to articulate their goals and priorities clearly and be proactive in communicating updates and progress.

Anticipate their needs

The project manager must try to anticipate the needs and preferences of the stakeholder being managed up and tailor work accordingly. For example, a project manager may need to adjust their work style and prioritize the stakeholder's requests while providing timely updates.

Show initiative

The project manager should proactively take on tasks or responsibilities that will help the stakeholder or the project succeed. This can help demonstrate your value and build trust.

Be collaborative

Rather than seeing the stakeholder as a potential obstacle, the project manager should view them as a partner in achieving shared goals. Look for ways to collaborate and work together effectively.

Be respectful

Even when managing up, the project manager must maintain respect for the stakeholder's position and authority. The project manager must never undermine a stakeholder's authority or act in a way that could be seen as insubordination.

The benefits of managing up

Project managers who successfully manage up can benefit in several ways.

Improved communication

When project managers effectively manage up, they establish clear lines of communication with their superiors and stakeholders, which helps ensure that expectations and priorities are aligned. This can reduce misunderstandings and delays and ensure that the project runs more smoothly.

Increased support

By building positive working relationships with their manager and senior stakeholders, project managers can gain greater support for their project. This can include access to additional resources, buy-in from stakeholders, and increased visibility within the organization.

Greater autonomy

When project managers effectively manage up, they may be given more autonomy to make decisions and take action. This can help them be more efficient and effective in their work and build their confidence and sense of ownership over the project.

Career advancement

Successfully managing up can demonstrate a project manager's leadership and communication skills, which can be valuable for career advancement opportunities within the organization. It can also increase the likelihood of being entrusted with more complex and high-profile projects in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, managing up is a crucial skill for project managers to have, especially when dealing with stakeholders who hold higher-level positions or have influence over a project.

By building positive relationships, communicating effectively, anticipating needs, showing initiative, being collaborative, and maintaining respect, project managers can successfully manage up to achieve shared goals and objectives. The benefits of managing up include improved communication, increased support, greater autonomy, and career advancement opportunities. By mastering the art of managing up, project managers can ensure the success of their projects and advance their careers within their organization.