

Transforming Your Project Team from Good to Great



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In today's business environment, projects are the means by which work gets done, and it's the vehicle teams use to deliver on an organization's strategy and objectives. It should come as no surprise, then, that project skills are in high demand. Many organizations are creating or investing in established project management offices (PMOs).

Project-based work is on the rise across all organizations, meaning some projects are even being managed by non-certified or "unofficial" project managers. While promising, this much opportunity can attract challenges.

As a senior project manager or head of a PMO, it's important that you assess your teams for skill gaps that may be inhibiting or preventing project success. For many certified project managers, the technical skills are likely there and well-honed, but the struggle is likely in developing and practicing relational or "soft skills."

If you recognize any of these occurrences in your teams, you likely have a relational skill gap:



Project managers struggle with engaging stakeholders and project team members and holding them accountable for their deliverables



Risks, while flagged, are not communicated effectively and in a proactive manner, so project teams are reactively struggling against risks they should have planned for or even avoided



Focusing all efforts on getting a project delivered on-time and on-budget, to the extent that the end result is detached from your organization's strategic goals

The reality is, soft skills are a misnomer; they are often the hardest skill gaps to diagnose, and even harder to address. Given the communications gaps that also fall under the soft skills umbrella, it might be hard for your team to articulate what their challenges even are. All of which forms a self-perpetuating cycle of good project teams failing to make the leap to great project teams.

Great Project Teams Today

We know organizations are executing *more* projects to get more work done—but they are also managing bigger and increasingly transformational projects. This shift in project scale requires a shift in project leadership—and explains why there is a greater demand than ever for technically adept project managers to also master the relational skills that can inspire teams and push a project across the finish line.

When you think of great project leaders, what abilities come to mind? Because your project leaders are ultimately the ones taking you from good project management to great project leadership, it is important that they possess the skills required to drive that kind of transformation.

We've identified several key skills your team needs to improve performance:



The ability to break down silos. Although projects are often cross-functional, many silos can exist that prevent work from getting done as quickly and efficiently as it should. Generally, silos are not just departmental. People can become siloed based on their age and gender, geographical location, and other factors. Project leaders must be able to get past these issues to engage and inspire cross-functional, geographically-disperse teams and help individuals understand the context of their work in the bigger picture.

Strong communication skills. Project leaders have to be able to communicate effectively with lots of different people, some of whom may be peers, some of whom may be superiors, and some of whom may be subordinates. The best project leaders engage in multi-channel outreach. This keeps a constant cadence of communication with stakeholders and team members, and allows them to tailor the tone and style of the communication to the relevant audience and need at hand. Establishing solid communication as part of project leadership will help your team members gain the trust of the project teams they are managing.

The ability to manage both up and down. Project managers are tasked with keeping project team members accountable, even if they aren't direct reports. That means knowing how to motivate them, keep track of their progress, and ultimately hold them responsible for doing what they're supposed to do. Both effective communications and breaking down silos come into play here, as it is all too easy for an individual to lose sight of their work in the context of a bigger deliverable and broader strategy.

Conflict management. Managing projects is about more than scoping requirements and managing risks. The hardest part of the job is managing the people who are doing the work and who can help mitigate—or in the worst cases, escalate—risk. As project leaders, your teams are managing a variety of personalities. They must be able to not only empower individual voices to speak up when challenges arise, but also be able to diffuse unavoidable personality conflicts and remind the team of the shared goal.

What Can You Do?

Managing a PMO and being responsible for all of the projects that contribute to your organization's success is not an easy job. It's certainly not made easier when the moving parts and dynamic personalities at play test the limits of your team's relational skills. The first step in getting off your project plateau and moving your team from good to great is realizing that there are barriers inhibiting project success. If any of the points above have resonated with you, your team might have a skill gap. While instilling relational skills may feel like an adjustment, it's one that will help you create the culture you need to predictably and repeatedly execute successful initiatives.

Much like technical skills, the best approach to developing relational skills in your team is to invest in targeted training. This training not only benefits the organization, but it signals to talent that you are making an investment in their future and offering them the skills they need to advance in their careers.