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Project Management Defined

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the Project Management Institute's definition of project management.
2. Analyze and evaluate the role of client expectations in a project.
3. Define project scope.

One of the priorities of the Project Management Institute (PMI) during the 1980s was to define project management and develop it as a profession. Debate continues on whether project management is a profession with an enforceable code of conduct and other traditional criteria for recognition as a profession. However, PMI's development of A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), and the project management certifications that derived from these efforts, helped promote the understanding and development of the project management field. Defining project management, and substantiating it as a profession, brought about the question of its purpose. Intense discussions resulted in a compromise to define **project management** as "the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements."¹

Be aware that PMI's definition is not the only view of what project management entails. Jack Meredith and Samuel Mantel² discussed project management in terms of producing project outcomes within the three objectives of cost, schedule, and specifications. According to this view, project management is the application of everything a project manager does to meet these parameters. This approach to defining project management shares PMI's focus on the project outcomes in terms of requirements, but Meredith and Mantel also added a fourth aspect of project management—the expectations of the client.



Image by petecocoon

If it is assumed that the client is the one who defines project requirements, then maybe project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to meet client requirements. This definition focuses on expectations rather than project specifications. It is possible to meet all project specifications and not meet client expectations. It is also possible to only accomplish one or more of the specifications, yet still meet or exceed a client's expectations.³

PMI's definition of project management provides a good understanding of project management, but it does not help us understand project success. For that, we must include the client.

District Curriculum Alignment Project

A school district in Colorado invested a substantial portion of the budget toward switching to a professional learning community (PLC) model for faculty development. The district requested a project that would align the curriculum with each subject and grade level and be used as benchmarks for to evaluate the PLC's work with students. The project brought together teachers from across the district to design essential learning objectives, which would be taken back to schools and PLCs. The project team created the essential learning objectives within the budget and time constraints that were approved by the district, but teachers at the individual schools were unhappy that the learning objectives were decided at the district level rather than at the school level. Even though this project met all of the original goals, the district was still disappointed.

Meredith and Mantel discussed a tendency noted by Russ Darnall⁴ that expectations often increase during the life of a project. Meredith and Mantel suggest that this is a form of scope increase.

Project scope is reflected in a carefully crafted document that reflects the performance specifications of the project deliverables. Defining the project scope and managing scope change is a very different process from developing an understanding of a client's expectations and managing those expectations. Darnall focused on defining and managing client expectations as a critical project

management skill that is distinct from scope development and management.

Client expectations encompass an emotional component that includes many client desires that are not easily captured within a specification document. Although closely correlated with project specifications, client expectations are driven by different needs. It is possible for a project team to exceed every project specification and end up with an unsatisfied client.

The reverse is also true. A project can be late and over budget and the client can be satisfied. Although this may be counterintuitive, the response of a client to the events of a project is complex and goes beyond the data related in project specifications.

Volunteer Training Program

A museum planned to use volunteers as gallery interpreters to facilitate a more engaging guest experience. The museum hired instructional designers to manage a project to plan, develop, and implement training for prospective volunteers. The original project specifications called for the training to last four hours. Throughout the project, it became clear to the project manager that the complexity of the learning objectives required more than four hours of training. The change in scope was approved by the museum, resulting in a significant increase in the total cost of the project. The museum, however, was satisfied with the project because it produced an effective training for volunteers. Client satisfaction is often tied to expectations about project performance. Identifying and managing those expectations is a primary responsibility of the project manager.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- According to PMI, project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to meet project requirements.
- The role of the client is crucial. Some experts include meeting or exceeding client expectations as a definitive element of project management.
- Project scope is a document that defines the work required to complete the project successfully.

[1] Project Management Institute, Inc., *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*, 4th ed. (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, Inc., 2008), 6.

[2] Jack R. Meredith and Samuel J. Mantel, Jr., *Project Management: A Managerial Approach* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006), 8.

[3] Russell W. Darnall, *The World's Greatest Project* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, Inc., 1996), 48-54.

[4] Russell W. Darnall, *The World's Greatest Project* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, Inc., 1996), 48-54.



Wiley, D. et al. (2018). Project Management for Instructional Designers. EdTech Books.
<https://edtechbooks.org/pm4id>



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