

Landing a man on the moon or building a skyscraper are incredibly complex projects requiring advanced project management (PM) skills. Highly skilled project managers pull off seemingly miraculous feats of coordination and collaboration. You may not need that caliber of PM skills, but even small organizations still need to rally multiple resources to launch products, plan events, create marketing materials, build business plans, and solve other problems.



Perhaps you've stumbled along through one too many projects, sometimes failing or only succeeding by superhuman efforts. Or maybe you've completed a project you thought was successful only to discover that others considered it a failure. You're convinced there has to be a better way!

Project management principles scale well to tackle any size project – that is, any endeavor with a beginning and an end that exists to accomplish a defined result. Volumes of books and certification courses exist to develop PM skills. But if you're not ready for that, here are a few basic PM questions that can help:

- 1. Who else needs to be involved and in what role(s)?** Think through the players and get their buy-in up front. Who ultimately gets to decide whether this project was successful or not? Who else has a vested interest in seeing it succeed? Who will be impacted by the project's outcome? Whose expertise will be needed at some point in the project? Engaging them early increases their personal commitment to the result.
- 2. Are we agreed on what a successful outcome looks like?** Make sure the key players all agree on the desired results. *Write it down and make sure they all agree with what's written.* If you don't, the target will shift throughout the project, and everyone may not shift in the same direction. If the desired results do change, write down every change and make sure everyone still agrees.
- 3. What are the risks to watch out for?** Ask everyone what obstacles might interfere with success. Assign someone responsibility for monitoring critical issues throughout the project.
- 4. What tasks need done, by whom, and by when?** Before anyone does any work, list the tasks required to get the desired results along with the name of the person responsible for each. Then sequence these based on dependencies and time requirements and assign due dates.
- 5. Who needs to be communicated to/how/when?** Keeping everyone aware of progress and difficulties along the way is essential. Agree on a communication plan – meetings, emails, web tools, or any other mechanism needed to assure no one is caught by surprise late in the game. Collaboration tools like *Trello* or *Asana* can help with this. Here's a Trello project template example: <https://trello.com/b/adYQf7k0>.
- 6. Lessons learned – what can I do better next time?** The best way to assure your next project goes even better is to learn from this one. Gather feedback at the project close about what worked and what could have been better. While you're at it, celebrate your project's success!

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