Project Management in Context

by Sophia

In this lesson, we'll review some of the ways project management is used in real-world projects. Specifically, you will focus on:

1. Common Areas for Project Management

Once you're familiar with the process of project management, it's easy to see how it can be used in so many industries and situations.

- *Business*: Every day, business around the world upgrade their technology and use project management to help the process go smoothly and quickly. When a business upgrades their phone system, the project manager must work with the phone system vendor, the voicemail developers, and coordinate the installation of equipment.

- *Research and development*: In this industry, there has been considerable movement of late to coordinate multiple research efforts so that information can be shared among different groups. Project managers will help manage those groups using the most powerful tool they have in their skill set: their ability to communicate clearly and concisely about the work to leverage what is learned.

- *Software and technology*: This industry, in particular, relies heavily on project management. Tablet computers have become common in all ways of life and were developed using the management methods that we've discussed.

- *Product Development*: The development of most products requires a design and a prototype before implementation. A car's engine must be designed and tested in the field before it can be manufactured in mass and placed in cars. Project managers oversee this work, keeping everyone on task to a common goal.

- *Event Planning*: Consider all the planning and management that goes into events such as sales conferences. Project managers work with hotels and conference centers, help manage the software that handles the sign-ups, and may even organize the appearance of speakers.

- *Entertainment*: In the movie industry, project managers are known as producers, but their responsibilities are nearly identical. They are responsible for the budget, schedule, and scope of the project, even while managing or delegating work to the creative groups responsible for the latest blockbuster.

- *Construction/Public Works*: These industries have used project managers for a long time. If a new hydroelectric dam is going up in your area, there is at least one, and likely many, project managers helping it meet the quality and performance standards outlined in the project scope.

- *Community/Non-Profit*: These groups also rely on project managers. A Habitat for Humanity house will have a general contractor, which is just another term for a project manager.
- *Everyday Life*: Even in a household, we use many of the skills and tools of a project manager. A remodel of a bathroom requires a budget, schedule, and clear idea of what the people in the house want from that bathroom. The work will need to be managed toward those goals, which is the role of a project manager.

2. Customizing the Approach

Now that we've covered quite a few of the common areas where project managers work, you probably understand that project managers must customize their approaches to fit the situations in which they work.

A project management process might vary by:

- Industry
- Organization size
- Project size
- Level of authority
- Project complexity

  ↗ EXAMPLE Iterative development, which was discussed in another lesson, relies on greater communication between workers, especially at the end of an iteration cycle.

  If the organization is large with geographically separated workers, this can be more challenging. It can certainly work, but the project manager might need to combine more elements of phase-based development into the iterative process for the project to succeed.

  ↗ EXAMPLE If a project manager is working in an industry with high risks, such as nuclear power, the scoping and planning phase will involve a much larger set of stakeholders.

  Additionally, the project manager will place greater emphasis on the safety and performance of the final deliverables than a project manager overseeing the creation of a video game.

  ⚙ THINK ABOUT IT

  What we've discussed in these lessons has hopefully given you a greater appreciation for the skills of a project manager, and perhaps you've already seen places where these skills can be used in your work and personal life.

  In your industry, what special circumstances might a project manager need to be prepared for?

  📋 SUMMARY

  In this lesson, you reviewed some of the **common areas for project management**. You also learned what might make a project manager **vary his or her approach**.

Source: This work adapted from Sophia Author Jeff Carroll.