

## The Three P's of Project Management

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Project management is an essential function of any organization offering services in the skilled trades. Project managers feel they are overutilized and underappreciated by owners, managers, subcontractors, and customers. Meanwhile, owners and managers wonder why their teams cannot consistently produce profitable projects with happy customers. Digging further into the three P's of project management can help all parties improve their processes and outcomes.

### People Management

First and foremost, project management is people management. While there are many people involved in the life cycle of a project, the people management at the focus of this article is the customer. The customer is not always right, but it is critical for the project manager to understand that the grading of the business experience has as much to do with how they feel about the process as it does with the project outcome.

People management means intentionally creating a consistent customer experience that reflects the organization's stated values. Intentional teams and project managers want the customer to be pleased with the unique way they approach a project. The key element of people management – and improved customer experience as a result – is communication.

*How many skilled trades professionals have heard a customer say, "I wish you would communicate with me less"?*



Businesspeople hear it all the time: "Communication is key." Those skilled trade organizations that practice communication in a clear, consistent, and functional way will set themselves apart. Because the project manager manages projects every day, they should be keenly familiar with the most common questions that customers ask. If the project manager wants to reduce unnecessary calls, questions, and complaints from their customers, they can use their functional wisdom to develop proactive communication. Experienced professionals in the organization can create a process that helps project managers address and answer questions before the customer asks them.

- » *Need* – Customer satisfaction
- » *Skill* – People management
- » *Key resource* – Communication
- » *Level up* – Proactive communication

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## Project Management

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By capturing and acting upon these frequently asked questions, the intentional project manager will be empowered to be proactive rather than reactive in their communication. To be proactive and ensure that they are sharing quality, functional information, the project manager should use one of the most important tools in their toolbox: the schedule.

A good schedule shows that the project manager has control of their process, knows what they need to do to achieve the goal, operates a well-oiled machine for the customer, and is able to adapt to new information. A good project manager is not a superhuman who never makes mistakes; they manage obstacles with skill and calm whenever they become a part of the equation.

A proper schedule is broken into three phases:

- » *Phase 1: Preproduction scheduling* – The first phase is creating a predictive process that helps the project manager, production team, and customer understand what the sequence of the project will be.
- » *Phase 2: Post-acquisition scheduling* – Once materials have been selected, ordered, and acquired, there is an update to the production schedule with the anticipated timelines for key items.
- » *Phase 3: Adaptive scheduling* – The role is called project management because everyone involved in the process must adapt to real-world conditions, which include constant changes.

***How many skilled trades professionals have heard a customer say, “I wish you would not give me a schedule or update me in advance when something changes”?***

A schedule should always be presented with the understanding that everything is subject to change at any moment.

This does not mean that a schedule should not be provided for every job regardless of scope or size. Failure to plan is planning to fail. While many customers have unrealistic expectations, most don't expect the project manager to be perfect. Through the three phases of scheduling, the project manager can educate, explain, and guide the customer through the process.

People and project management intersect whenever there is a delay or change to the schedule. Bad news does not get better with time, so the project manager should address changes sooner rather than later. Intentional project managers learn to speak in terms of solutions. For example, one might say, “We have an obstacle, but do not fear; I already have a contingency plan in the works, and here is what we are going to do to keep things moving forward.”

- » *Need* – Timely project completion (cycle times)
- » *Skill* – Project coordination
- » *Key resource* – Scheduling
- » *Level up* – Adaptation

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## Process Management

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Process management refers to all the compliance tools and requirements that an organization incorporates into creating their unique outcomes. Internal communications and documentation are essential to equipping all members of the team with the same project information in real time. These include contracts, change orders, communication logs, jobsite photos, etc. One way to ensure the project manager is clearly and consistently communicating with the customer is through a weekly job progress update. A simple, weekly job progress update is good discipline for keeping project managers on top of their process and informing the customer of job updates.

The following list is a job progress update format:

- » What is the current percentage of job completion based on the existing contract?
- » What is the estimated date of completion?
- » What work has been completed this week?
- » What work are we planning to complete next week?
- » Are there any anticipated delays affecting the schedule?
- » Have we updated all parties involved with the project on this information?

Project management requires external communication (customer) as well as internal communication (documentation).

At the organizational level, it is essential to provide training for team members to set clear expectations for the communication process. Owners and managers can help their teams achieve their communication goals by allocating people and product resources to this essential function.


- » What is the customer communication standard operating procedure?
- » How often does the team train in the art of customer communication?

At the project manager level, communication should be clear, consistent, and proactive. The customer should receive updates via an in-person meeting or phone call at least once a week, followed up by text, and email verification. The test of whether communication has been successful is not whether the project manager has completed the function, but whether the customer has understood the communication.

- » Have you provided the customer with a schedule and updated him or her at least weekly on the job progress?
- » Can anyone call the customer at any time, and would they say communication is good and that they comprehend the project life cycle?

Communication, adaptation, and documentation are all key skills that must develop and evolve over time. Building out a clear, consistent and accountable operational system is what helps organizations to produce consistently positive outcomes.

- » *Need* – Consistent outcomes
- » *Skill* – Operations
- » *Key resource* – Documentation
- » *Level up* – Consistency and accountability

How the customer feels about the project is the measure by which they grade the team's performance. As professionals, we often focus on the project-related skills, but if any of these three elements deserves more of a focus, it would be people management. Organizations that learn with their team members how to develop and evolve these three skills will continue to set themselves apart from their competition. 

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## Developing the 3 P's

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The organization and the individual project manager share the responsibility to develop these three P's. Too often the focus is on one element, which results in the others lagging. Organizations that want to elevate their customer experience, reduce their cycle time, and produce consistent outcomes will understand the benefits of investing in these areas.



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### About the Author

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### About the Article

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