



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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How Much of Project Management is Administration?

A lot of project managers would relate to the comment that it seems like the project manager does a lot of administrative work. However, to be honest, administrative work is also in the eye of the beholder. What one person sees as administrative work might be part of controlling the project to another person.

A quick recap

Let's do a quick recap just to make sure everyone is on the same page. In general, the project manager is responsible for the overall success of the project. He or she leads the team through a definition and planning phase, and then monitors and controls the project until it successfully (you hope) concludes. This would include managing scope, issues, quality, etc. Notice that performing administrative work is not a part of that simple definition.

Don't forget people management

The project team may or may not report functionally to the project manager. The project team may report to a different manager for things like performance reviews, while reporting to the project manager for their workload. In other companies, the functional reporting relationship goes directly to the project manager. However, in either case, the project manager must also perform people management responsibilities. This includes soft skills like listening, providing feedback, being empathetic, providing leadership, etc. There are many instances of project managers who are unsuccessful based solely on their lack of interpersonal and people management skills.

What exactly is administrative work?

You have quickly seen that the project manager has process management and people management responsibilities as a part of their general project management roles. Now, consider administrative duties. The first question to ask yourself is exactly what is administrative work for a project manager? Part of the answer has to do with how you feel about the various responsibilities that a project manager has. Let's look at a few and see what you think.

1. **Status reporting.** You can tell a lot about the mindset of a project manager based on how they look at status reporting. Many project managers think that status reporting falls under administrative work. Others believe that status reporting falls directly into the role of a project manager to proactively communicate status. When in a project management role, you should plan out the best way to deliver status updates to your stakeholders as a part of a Communication Plan. Depending on your point of view, this may or may not be considered administrative work. It might just be considered a fundamental part of your project management responsibilities.



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2. **Updating the workplan.** Some project managers hate to update a workplan, and think that this is an administrative burden. What do you think? To many, updating the workplan is one of the core responsibilities of the project manager.
3. **Completing a Project Definition.** Again, many project managers just want to get going and start the work. To them, planning is an afterthought, not something that should hold up a project. To others, if the project manager views the definition process as administrative work, it implies a certain lack of project management maturity. There is always a legitimate question as to how much planning is required, but there never should be a question about doing it or not doing it.
4. **Updating project logs and forms.** Many projects have forms that they use to request scope changes, or perhaps the project manager is keeping track of issues on an Issues Log. Are these administrative tasks, or are they the valuable tools of a project manager?
5. **Performance reviews.** If you have project team members that report to you, you undoubtedly have some paperwork to do around the performance review process. This has a direct tie to your people management role. Would you consider this administrative or not?

Ask again – what is administrative work?

With this in mind, you should again help define administrative work. For sure, you could probably come up with times when the work might be administrative. For instance, if your organization requires some type of report that is not project focused, you might say that it is administrative. You may also participate in other non-project related activities such as interviewing new employees, filling out surveys and responding to management requests for information.

Summary

Some project managers think that anytime a document is involved, it is an administrative task. Some might go as far as to say that anything that requires writing (or typing) is administrative. But is that really the case? This response should give you some more insight into the project management role. Much of what might appear to be administrative work is really the direct input or output related to project management or people management. Project managers can master this aspect of their job and relegate it to a smaller percentage of their time. However, if you have an aversion to this type of work, project management may not be right for you.