



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Take a Quick Test to Determine if you are a Strong Project Manager

Project management pundits have written extensively about the processes, techniques and best practices associated with managing projects successfully. There is value to reinforcing these messages from the standpoint of different peoples' experiences and observations. It is interesting to boil down to the most important skills required to manage projects.

If your projects are small, sometimes you can get away with sloppy or loose processes. However, the larger the project gets, the more skills you need to successfully manage your project.

The following questions have been worded in a way that will allow you to answer "yes" or "no," even though there are shades of gray on some of them as well. Your comfort in using a particular skill, or the lack of using it, doesn't mean you are bad, but it does point out something in terms of your project management aptitude.

Okay, take out a sheet of paper and look at these ten project management skills and traits.

(Y / N) You don't plan well because you consider yourself a "do-er" rather than a planner. Many people consider themselves action oriented. When they are given an assignment, their first tendency is to jump in and solve the problem. The question has a built-in bias, since it implies that "planning" is not "doing". Still, answer yes or no.

(Y / N) You manage with minimal collaboration and interaction with customers and team members. This is the classic case of the person who feels more comfortable working alone. Many people are more productive this way. They work by themselves on the project plan, hand out work assignments and validate that the work is done. However, they tend to be uncomfortable with a lot of people interaction.

(Y / N) You tend to make excuses for problems rather than take responsibility. Some project managers step up and understand they are responsible for most of what goes on within a project. Others prefer not to work at that level. To them, there is always a logical reason why things don't get done. What is your preference? Do you try to explain the problems away, or do you take responsibility for the good and the bad, and strive to eliminate the causes of problems and failures?

(Y / N) You are an order-taker for your business client and do not use scope change management. Does client-focused behavior to you mean that you take on whatever the client wants? Or do you invoke scope change processes to manage the changes.

(Y / N) You let problems sit until they become disasters? Let's face it. There are many procrastinators around. Do you consider project problems to be nuisances that you hope will go away? Do you focus on problems only after they reach a high-enough threshold that they are impacting the project?

(Y / N) You don't create a workplan, or you do not keep it up to date. This is common on many projects. Many project managers go through the exercise of creating a



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project workplan, but then they never update it, or they abandon it somewhere in the project lifecycle. If they are asked how much work is remaining, they have a vague idea, but cannot quantify the remaining effort.

(Y / N) You would rather deliver poor quality than admit you need more time. Many projects finish on time and within budget, but do so only at the expense of quality. These project managers believe they will deliver on time, and then fix the problems in production. Are you one of them?

(Y / N) You spring surprises at the last minute rather than manage expectations. This trait represents either a tendency to be overly optimistic about what can be done in a short time frame, or else a conscious act to hide information and hope things work out. The first situation can be caused by inexperience, but the second instance is where the project manager withholds information as part of a deliberate strategy.

(Y / N) You ignore risks. Some risks can be seen from the start of a project. Other risks can be viewed later while the project is executing. Many project managers don't even consider risk management as a part of their project responsibilities. Other managers can identify risk, but then they do nothing about it until it is too late.

(Y / N) You communicate the minimum information required. It is surprising how many project managers think that communication is one of the drudgeries of the job. Their project team might be making heroic efforts on the project, but when it comes to communicating status they want to write the bare minimum. They also don't have regular status meetings. If your project requires extensive communication, would you relish the challenge or be frustrated by all the people who want to know what's going on.

Score yourself

Okay, now lets add up the "yes" answers. There were ten categories total, right? The number grades should be as follows:

“0” - If you did not answer yes to any category, you likely have a good chance of success as a project manager.

“1” – You are not perfect, but not hopeless. Work on the category so that you can answer “no” in the future.

“2” – This is a borderline score. Depending on what the two categories are, you may be able to overcome the weaknesses through additional focus. Work on the two categories in question to turn them around.

More the “2” – If you answered yes to three or more categories, you have work to do on your project management mindset. This doesn't mean you are a bad person. But, given the categories above, you should question your knowledge of good project management practices, or else your overall motivation for taking on project management work. Perhaps you can focus on these areas for improvement and take the test again in six months.

Summary



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All of the categories above are worded to show weak project management practices. Answering “no” to all ten items does not guarantee success. However, answering “yes” on any of them shows an area that will place a project at risk – especially a larger or more complex one.

Would anyone argue that any of the categories represent good traits that should not be considered weaknesses of a project manager? If so, post a note below.