# Soft Skills Required for Project Management

**Published on 31 January 2023 at 12:03**

**Author: Kimberly Wiethoff**

Soft skills are essential for effective project management, enabling leaders to communicate, collaborate, and adapt in dynamic environments. Key soft skills include communication, empathy, active listening, clarity, and building structured communication processes. These skills foster team cohesion and ensure project success.

While project managers use technical skills to measure progress, create budgets, and analyze project performance, they must also develop a set of soft skills to help lead, manage, and motivate the team while developing relationships with team members, stakeholders, and clients. Project managers are in charge of project planning, execution, and completion. Soft skills help project managers build a collaborative team and oversee successful projects. A project manager's toolbox contains a variety of soft skills that can be used to improve all aspects of project management.

## Communication

Project managers must be able to communicate effectively. According to the Project Management Institute's Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge ([PMBOK](https://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-standards)), 75-90 percent of a project manager's time is spent communicating. Communication abilities include the following:

* Listening - Understanding what the other person is saying is more important than conveying what you want to convey. Active listening can aid in the prevention of misunderstandings.
* Empathy - Being able to put yourself in the shoes of another person allows you to better understand not only what they are saying, but also why they are saying it. You may miss the point of what the other person is saying if you lack empathy.
* Clarity - After listening to and fully understanding what the other person is saying, project managers must ensure that the message they want to convey comes across clearly. It is critical to communicate clearly by speaking slowly and carefully articulating your words, as well as checking in with others during the conversation to ensure your words are coming across correctly.
* Building Processes - Creating a communication process or a dedicated team communication channel allows for improved communication. People can use the process and channel to get updates or to ask questions about what has already been discussed. People who know where to go to get the answers they need are better able to communicate with the project team.

A framework for establishing effective communication plan should include the following:

* A purpose
* A clear outline of project needs
* A list of communication needs
* Timelines, Dates, and Frequency
* Roles and Responsibilities

### Communication (STAR)

**Situation**

The business analyst on the team was reporting that one of the software developers was not able to complete his work according to the requirements that were written in the story.  The developer was the type of person who likes to jump in quickly and get things done as soon as possible.

**Task**

Because of a communication breakdown, the software developer and the business analyst were unable to reach an understanding that would have helped them address the problem of not achieving the task's criteria.

**Action**

As a project manager, I listened carefully to what the business analyst had to say about the missing requirements. I was confident in my software developer's ability to complete the task correctly, but there was a disconnect between them. I collaborated with the business analyst to ensure that all of the requirements were clearly stated in the story, as well as the acceptance criteria. I worked with the software developer to improve communication about requirements and acceptance criteria. For example, if he had any questions, I asked him to write them down in the story to ensure that he fully understood what was expected.  Once the questions were written in the story, I asked him to set up a backlog grooming meeting with the business analyst to get the questions answered. After having discussions over the questions, the answers were then agreed upon and written in the story.

**Result**

By working with both individuals on the approved communication plan, they were able to work collaboratively to both better prepare for the software development and to complete the tasks as expected.  The software developer slowed down a bit, but the business analyst also saw the need to prepare better for the software development to be done without issues.

## Collaboration

Collaboration within a team appears to be a simple concept to grasp, and the benefits of collaboration help the team complete projects successfully. However, collaborating with everyone on the team can be difficult because each member brings his or her own set of strengths and weaknesses, communication preferences, and personal goals. The ability of teams to collaborate is also influenced by company culture. Some organizations train team members in collaboration skills, while others assume that collaboration will occur naturally. Team members should be encouraged to maintain open lines of communication and to avoid withholding information that others may require to complete their tasks. When establishing goals and methods for completing project tasks, it is critical to achieve team consensus.

Recognizing team members' contributions is crucial when they play a key role in completing tasks. Teams might feel more at ease working together when challenges are identified and dealt with as a team. The team will get stronger and be able to work together moving forward if everyone is willing to express their regret for their errors and forgive others for doing the same. Communication skills, emotional intelligence, and tolerance for variety are necessary for collaborative work.

### Collaboration (STAR)

**Situation**

One of the software developers on the team was trying to solve an issue.  He had stated in the daily standup that there was an impediment to getting the issue resolved.

**Task**

The impediment needed to be removed for him to be able to continue with that task and other tasks assigned to him in the sprint.

**Action**

At the end of the meeting, I suggested that anyone on the team with knowledge about the impediment stay for a few minutes to discuss ways of removing the impediment to help the developer out.

**Result**

The lead developer and other developers had a discussion after the stand up.  They asked him questions and he was able to ask some questions to the group.  There were a few suggestions made that he could try to resolve the impediment.  The team stormed the issue and were able to collaboratively help the developer move forward in his tasks.  If the developer had not spoken up about the issues he was facing, he could have possibly spent more time than was necessary resolving the issue.  When teams work collaboratively, they are able to brainstorm and come up with multiple solutions.

## Time Management

Projects are subject to deadlines. A project manager's job includes establishing timelines, milestones, and goals. Time management is the efficient use of time to complete individual tasks within a project as well as the overall completion of the project. Project managers must manage their own time while also assisting the other members of the team in managing theirs. Project managers organize, coordinate, and oversee every detail of a project and, in some cases, multiple projects at once. Project managers place a high value on keeping team members focused on the overall project goals and their individual responsibilities within the project.

Project managers develop and control the schedule, help define activities (work breakdown structure), sequence activities, estimate activity resources, and estimate activity durations. Items in the project plan must be organized and prioritized, with the items with the highest return on investment at the top and others organized in order of importance.

### Time Management (STAR)

**Situation**

Throughout the day, the agile team was asked to participate in meetings with stakeholders. This was preventing them from concentrating for long periods of time. This was causing discord and frustration among the team members.

**Task**

The software developers needed to have 3 to 4 hours of uninterrupted time to be able to focus on their work.

**Action**

During the stakeholder meeting, the project manager announced that the developers needed 3 to 4 hours of uninterrupted time each day and that meetings with software developers should be limited and only requested during the first half of the day. The project manager asked that stakeholders invite the project manager to the meeting and that a software developer be called in if needed. The project manager instructed the developers to block their calendars for 3 or 4 hours in the afternoon so that they could work without interruption from meetings.

**Result**

By allowing agile team members to block their calendars, they were able to stay focused on the tasks at hand. The project manager was able to attend stakeholder meeting requests and obtain the information required during the daily standup meeting. The team felt more productive and capable of completing the sprint's objectives.

## Problem Solving, Decision Making, Analytical Thinking, and Predicting

Project managers must be skilled at problem solving, decision making, analytical thinking, and forecasting. These abilities enable project managers to anticipate problems before they occur. Project managers can devise problem-solving techniques and keep an eye out for anything that could jeopardize the project's timeline.

### Project Estimation and Prediction (STAR)

**Situation**

The Agile team was working on stories that had not been estimated.  They had no idea when they would be able to complete all or some of the tasks and the project was under great stress from upper management to be delivered by a specific deadline.

**Task**

The goal was to come up with an estimated time of completion for stories in the backlog.

**Action**

It was suggested to the team that each story be categorized using the Fibonacci scale or T-shirt sizes. I suggested comparing the stories inside each size after sizing was complete to see if they were indeed within the same size. Some of the longer stories were divided into shorter ones. Based on the comparison, several of them were transferred to different sizes. To determine a range of completion, the sizes were given a best/worst case time to complete.

**Result**

We were able to provide top management with a best case/worst case estimate of how long it would take to finish all the jobs in the backlog after measuring the stories and establishing a timeframe. According to the estimations, it would require more time than the deadline allowed. With senior management's support, we were able to prioritize the stories so that the highest priority jobs could be finished by the deadline while the less important ones could be finished later.

## Flexibility

Managerial flexibility is the ability to regularly adapt to stress and changing demands. Everyone on the team must be adaptable, and it is the project manager's responsibility to assist in developing a solution that is acceptable to both the team and upper management. Achieving project objectives in a rapidly changing environment necessitates adaptability.

When analyzing the situation, all stakeholders should be involved, and alternative methods and approaches should be thoroughly investigated. Risks for all approaches should be identified and, if possible, mitigated. Project buffers are usually unavailable because resources are finite and limited. When unexpected events occur and push the schedule out of bounds, project managers have the ability to work with the schedule to make subtle changes that can help the situation. Change is unavoidable, and adapting to it necessitates flexibility.

### Flexibility (STAR)

**Situation**

The team had a tight deadline, and they were working at full capacity.  Everyone on the team was doing their best to get tasks done in order to meet the deadline.

**Task**

In order to meet the deadline, the team was going to have to put in some extra hours outside of the usual time allotted for work.

**Action**

I, the project manager, had to have a difficult conversation with higher management and the team after doing a situation analysis. When I alerted the executive management of the problem, I was told that an extension of the deadline was not possible. I enquired as to whether they would sanction comp time for the team members who had consented to work on the weekends for a duration outside of the designated work hours. In exchange for working hours over a few weekends, management agreed to let team members take some much-needed time off after the project was complete.

**Result**

The project deadline was met, and the team was able to celebrate delivering the project within the strict deadline.  Managment was able to move forward knowing that our team had gone the extra mile to get the job done.  Team members were able to schedule a few days off when it was convenient for them as long as it did not interfere with another deadline.  Project expectations are not always realistic and sometimes compromises have to be made.

## Additional Soft Skills to Consider

**Conflict Resolution & Management**

**Emotional Intelligence, Trust**

**Teamwork, Team Building, Coaching**

**Leadership, Coaching, and Team Motivation**

## Final Thoughts

While technical knowledge lays the foundation for successful project delivery, it’s the soft skills that elevate a project manager from competent to exceptional. Mastering communication, empathy, active listening, and adaptability creates an environment where teams thrive and stakeholders stay engaged. As projects grow more complex and cross-functional, the ability to lead with emotional intelligence becomes just as critical as managing timelines and budgets. Investing in these human-centric skills is not just beneficial—it’s essential for sustained project success and impactful leadership.

#SoftSkills #ProjectManagement #CommunicationSkills #EmpathyInLeadership #ActiveListening #TeamCollaboration #LeadershipDevelopment #EmotionalIntelligence #Adaptability #ConflictResolution #StakeholderEngagement #EffectiveCommunication #TeamMotivation #AgileLeadership #ProjectSuccess