

Project Manager Competency Framework

Introduction

Successful project managers draw on a combination of technical skills, leadership abilities, personal working styles, and contextual understanding of the environments in which they operate. This resource introduces the Project DPro Project Management Competency Model, which outlines the core competencies that help project managers deliver successful projects in the international development sector. You can use this resource to:

- Reflect on your own strengths and areas for development as a project manager
- Identify skills your project team or organization may need to strengthen
- Guide professional development conversations or training plans
- Support recruitment or role definition for project management positions

The level of competency required in each area will vary depending on the size, complexity, and risk of the project.

The Project DPro Competency Model

The Project DPro competency model groups project management skills into four key areas. Together, they combine the “science” of project management (tools, processes, systems) with the “art” of leadership and collaboration.

Leadership and interpersonal skills

These competencies represent the “art” of project management. They focus on how project managers work with people, influence teams, and build collaboration. Strong leadership skills help project managers create motivated teams and maintain stakeholder support.

Key leadership competencies include:

- Understanding the broader vision of a project within an organizational portfolio
- Championing the project and building stakeholder buy-in
- Communicating a clear vision and setting realistic expectations
- Providing constructive performance feedback to team members
- Creating an environment where team members collaborate effectively
- Communicating proactively through clear written and verbal communication
- Listening actively to stakeholders and team members
- Motivating individuals and teams to achieve shared goals

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Technical project management

These competencies relate to the systems, tools, and processes that enable effective project planning and control. A technically competent project manager can design project structures, monitor progress, manage resources, and ensure deliverables meet expected quality standards.

Key technical competencies include:

- Managing project scope to ensure only agreed deliverables are completed unless formal changes are approved
 - Identifying and sequencing all activities required to achieve project outcomes
 - Managing the project schedule so work is completed on time and within budget
 - Defining and collecting metrics to track progress and performance
 - Identifying, tracking, and resolving project issues
 - Managing project risks and developing mitigation strategies
 - Communicating project information to stakeholders in a timely and appropriate manner
 - Establishing systems for procurement, logistics, and resource management
 - Monitoring deliverable quality and ensuring standards are met
 - Managing changes and assessing their impact on the project
 - Planning and managing the project budget and expenditures
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Personal and self-management skills

Effective project managers must also manage their own work and decision-making processes. These competencies influence how efficiently and effectively project managers approach their responsibilities.

Important self-management competencies include:

- Strong organizational skills
- Attention to detail
- Ability to manage multiple tasks and priorities
- Logical thinking and structured problem solving
- Analytical thinking and decision making
- Self-discipline and accountability
- Effective time management

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Development sector specific competencies

Projects in the international development sector operate in complex and dynamic environments. Project managers must therefore apply their technical and leadership skills in ways that reflect sector-specific realities.

Development-specific competencies include:

- Understanding the values and approaches that influence development work, such as rights-based approaches, participation, and integrated development
 - Recognizing the perspectives, roles, and interests of different stakeholders
 - Navigating complex political, social, and operational environments
 - Working effectively with multiple implementing partners
 - Understanding how multiple projects contribute to wider outcomes and long-term impact
 - Coping with the pressures and uncertainty often present in development contexts
 - Demonstrating cultural sensitivity when working with diverse teams and communities
 - Identifying safety and security risks associated with project activities
 - Planning contingencies and adapting to changing circumstances
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Reflecting on your competencies

Use the competency areas above as a self-reflection tool. Consider the following questions:

- Which competency areas are your strongest?
- Which areas do you find most challenging in your current role?
- Are there skills you need to strengthen to manage more complex projects?
- What training, mentoring, or experience could help you develop these skills?

Recognizing both strengths and gaps is an important step toward continuous professional development as a project manager.

Further learning

Project managers who want to explore their competency levels in more detail can complete the Project DPro self-assessment, available through PM4NGOs [here](#).