ENDEAVOUR STRATEGIES

A NEW DIMENSION TO EXCELLENCE

33 HATS
of a 21st Century Project Manager

An unbelievable list of qualities needed by today's IT Project Manager!

Hopefully the days of the desk bound, pen pushing approach of an IT project manager are virtually extinct! That is of course if he or she is to be fully equipped and capable of tackling all of the challenges associated with delivering an IT project in these modern times.

Commercial pressure nowadays dictate your projects have to be delivered quicker, cheaper and with no adverse impact to the quality of the solution. The pace of today's business is ten times that of twenty years ago and the modern day IT project manager faces frequent challenges to their vast portfolio of skills.

Companies and organisations are much more transparent and customer focused paying more attention to what the customer actually wants. This new liberated approach brings with it a raft of fresh challenges when it comes to delivering the related IT projects.

… And the good news? The vast majority of these fresh challenges fall directly under the responsibility of the project manager if success is to be the end result! A tough ask but if you can tick all of the boxes you'll be able to wrestle the IT project octopus to victory.

The Problem:

To be <u>successful</u> in today's highly pressurised world of IT project delivery requires much more than just the basic skills of yesteryear. Put in basic terms it just simply isn't enough for a project manager to get by with the 'old school' type skills.

Gone are the days of producing a good workable plan and implementing it from behind a desk whilst managing the budget with no major dramas if one or more of the constraints aren't met. It's a sign of the times and like it or not expectations are a lot higher and the margin for error is much less nowadays.

Generally speaking, despite the evidence available, we continue to have less human resource, budgets are slashed but the quality is still expected to be on a par with the norm.

The show must still go on. So how do we overcome these challenges? It's a different ball game in the modern day with the commercial implications for a company or organisation if a project is delayed or worst still fails. Stealing a march on your competitor is all-important and can mean the difference between success and failure, translating into millions of pounds of profit or loss and often with hundreds of jobs at stake.

Granted, the old style project manager is still evident but very much (hopefully) a retiring, shrinking breed. They can no longer afford to hide behind the door of their office, using the phone to stay in touch with the outside world and attending the odd face-to-face meeting to let everyone know they're still functioning.

Today's commercial environment is fast and furious and this is reflected in the attitude shown to the supporting role of IT and those that manage it. Timescales are slashed as companies try to stay ahead or at least match their competitors.

Budgets are significantly reduced in order to stay leaner, keeping the costs down and remaining profitable. Quite often this means resourcing levels are kept at a bare minimum introducing further risk with significant numbers of single-points-of-failure dotted all over the workstreams.

> In 1995 The Standish Group conducted a survey named The Chaos Report. Research showed over 31% of IT projects were cancelled before they were completed.
>
> 52% cost over 189% of their original estimates.
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> 7 out of 10 IT projects fail one or more criteria – that's 70%! In other words only 3 out of 10, i.e. 30% of projects meet all of the criteria (timescale, budget & suitability).
>
> In larger companies only 9% of their projects come in on time and on budget. So that must mean that 91% of their projects do not meet both of these constraints.

A good illustration of this would be a previous assignment of mine where I was taken on to "turn around" a project that had gone off the rails and was in jeopardy of being another statistic in the catalogue of failures.

The proposed solution was eventually deemed as fit for purpose but a significant number of delays had been experienced effecting deadlines with a threat to the budget.

The project was part of a major business initiative to introduce a new style of business partnership between two leading companies, one a telecoms company and the other a high street bank. It was high profile with the stock exchange keeping a close eye on progress. Failure was not in the vocabulary!

For this project to be successful the person responsible for pulling all of this together was going to have to wear many, many hats. In fact most if not all of the 33 identified and explained further on!

The original programme manager had tried to run the project remotely. Unfortunately he had lost touch with both the customer and the various project teams involved.

There were a number of issues that needed tackling locally and <u>not</u> from a distance. The working relationship had broken down, primarily due to a lack of trust by the customer in what they were being told as reasons for all of the various delays.

The other main supplier involved had been left to do pretty much as they pleased. They had undergone a significant challenge to their resourcing levels; they were heavily involved in the development of the new Wembley stadium, itself suffering from its own challenges.

The supplier had to back-fill the staff being used on the new Wembley project with sub-contractors that brought further issues with the quality of their work and reliability etc. There wasn't even a project manager assigned to the project for me to liase with!

Our project team was pretty demoralised, a number of delays meant there was no clear direction. Confidence in the solution had at one point been low and the relationship between both project teams had never recovered. There were many facets to the project that needed addressing, indeed every one of the 33 hats were probably going to get an airing if things were going to get turned around.

The Solution:

An IT project has to demonstrate many good characteristics to be successful with a large number of them deriving from the project manager. Today's business solutions have to be brought to bear on the market quicker, more efficiently and more effectively. The shelf life is reduced, the solution is no longer around for many years, often replaced in relatively short space of time. The project ends up taking the path of least resistance.

So what are some of the features, characteristics and skills of the project manager to ensure the successful delivery of his or her project? Well, they need to have broad shoulders and arm themselves with a flak jacket, a tin helmet and a pretty good sense of humour. Oh and a large holdall to carry all of the following hats around with them!

This most certainly isn't the finite list of hats that need to be worn but it makes a good start!

1. **Newsreader**
    Being able to break good and bad news to the customer and your project team in a professional manner, both factual and without emotion. You will be regularly judged on how you handle and react to the bad news probably more so than the good. If you handle it well you maybe invited back and take up a regular slot at peak viewing!

2. **Weather forecaster**
    Having the ability to tell if it's blue skies or storms ahead. Then relaying this to your customer and the project teams. This needs to be with one eye on the day-to-day forecast and also with a longer-term view as well. Offering advice on suitable attire is also usually well received.

3. **Comedian and clown**

Being able to keep moral high and maintain a sense of humour.
Never be too serious. Keep up your professional image whilst providing
some lighter moments by entertaining the troops. Pick your moment to
have a laugh though; remember there's a time and a place! There's no
harm in having a reputation of viewing things on the lighter side
providing the work gets down properly. People will actually prefer to
work with and for you.

4. Salesman
Most important, sell your project at every opportunity, the earlier the
better. Make sure all of the positives are celebrated and people know
about it. Do not hide the negatives but sandwich them in and amongst
the positives. Highlight all that's gone well the impact to the project,
the company overall, individuals and other projects. Make sure your
team fully understand, appreciate and value their contribution.

5. Agony Aunt
Bordering on a counsellor, but less formal. This is where you have to
put all of your worries to the back of your mind and concentrate on
everyone else's problems! You're a great listener and when appropriate
you'll solve everyone else's dilemmas. Not always what you need but it
will certainly be expected of you.

6. Policeman
The project streets will be a safer place with the uniformed PC Project
Wizard patrolling them! You'll make sure the rules and regulations are
adhered to and that everything's done properly. Use tact and
diplomacy when dealing with offenders. View your 'policing' duties
more as "quietly monitoring" unless of course there are some serious
matters that need addressing.

7. Private detective
On the odd occasion you may not get the full story or all of the facts.
This is where you will have to make some subtle and discreet enquiries
to determine the real picture and make your decisions accordingly.
This is the non-uniformed, less official version of policing. Beware of
less obvious working relationships when making your enquiries!

8. Fireman
At times this may well require the full scope of a fireman's working
brief. Preferably preventing a fire in the first place, failing that actually
fighting a fire and damping down afterwards, or even rescuing
somebody from wreckage. It's also recommended that you're familiar
with knowing what materials to use on the various types of fire and
being able to spot an accelerant when you see one!

9. Paramedic
Being able to diagnose an ailment and being able to apply treatment
quickly and effectively to a distressed part of the project's anatomy.
This prompt action could very well avoid a more serious injury or
incident later on in the lifetime of your project.

10. MC - Master of Ceremonies

Chairing the variety of project's meetings, making sure events run smoothly, that the agenda's followed, the meetings are structured, efficient, actions captured and that they are an effective use of everyone's time.

11. Magician

Having the ability to pull a rabbit out of a hat is a gift that should be practised regularly even if it comes naturally. This skill must not be ignored; it has saved many a project manager and project alike and will continue to do so for many years to come. If it doesn't come naturally then start learning quickly, recognise this vital part of your armour. It may not actually be magic you perform, but an optical illusion can easily have the same affect!

12. Surgeon

Sometimes first aid isn't enough to help or save a project. There may need to be a more serious approach, may be even an expert surgical procedure that has to be performed by a skilled specialist.

13. Physiotherapist

Having conducted a remedial procedure it's important to carry out a series of exercises to make sure a full long-term recovery is made. You will need to check the patient carries out the prescribed exercises so that the corrective work makes a permanent difference.

14. General Practitioner

Continuing with the medical theme. You need to be able to diagnose virtually every type of ailment going. That isn't to say you will instantly be able to prescribe a remedy but at least know where to look or ask. GPs have many resources and there's no reason why you shouldn't either.

15. Negotiator / arbitrator

Acting in effect as a go-between, identifying, exploring and proposing a solution or a workable compromise between all of the interested parties. Your quick thinking and determination can easily make the difference between the project maintaining it's pace, stuttering or coming to a halt.

16. Author

You'll need this skill for the many documents an IT project manager needs to make sure all the elements of your project are captured and well documented. Some may be down to you to produce and some you will be required to sign off. Either way experience and knowledge of producing documentation is a must.

17. Journalist

This is where you need to have an eye for a good story, working in conjunction with the salesman side of you as well. Being able to ask the right people the right questions so that your story is accurate and factual. If you're writing a piece, be it a report or article, then it is

basically "sales copy", salesmanship in writing. A catchy headline with structured content and written in a style that will engage the reader.

18. Cleaner
When the celebration is over or the storm has subsided, somebody, yes you've guessed it (you) will have to clear up the mess! Whatever happens, either way, there will be clearing up to do. This tidying up exercise can often reflect on your overall performance. Quite often it may not even be mess you are directly responsible for, but it will reflect on your project, so it's important that you do a good job.

19. Dustman
Having cleaned up the mess and debris left over it will all need collecting and disposed of. That will probably fall to you as well. Again, not necessarily of your making but how the project's left will reflect on you. Doing the jobs that nobody else wants to do is not always the most desirable or attractive. However, it will win you respect as somebody who's disciplined and dedicated enough to get the job done and see it through.

20. Bank manager
This virtually speaks for itself, making sure you keep tabs on the budget and your fingers on the purse string. You need to treat the budget and the spending of the money as if it were your own.

21. Coach / mentor
There will be plenty of occasions where opportunities will present themselves for you to coach and mentor members of your project team. This can be done individually or collectively. There will also be occasions when you could even do some subtle coaching of your peers, highly recommended if you can be discreet about it and it will improve the performance of your project overall.

22. Astrologer
You must have the ability to predict your project's future, perhaps by considering the position of the planets, moon and sun or at least their influence! A crystal ball always comes in handy as well although often very scarce and probably being used elsewhere.

23. Public speaker
Often called upon to either speak up or just speak on behalf of your project - don't turn down the opportunity. It could well help toward clearing up any confusion or highlighting a particular positive in front of the correct audience.

24. UN peace keeper
A United Nations Blue Beret is a worthy member of the skills portfolio. Being able to keep your cool while all those around you are flustered and chaos rules. Above all maintaining a neutral peacekeeping presence.

25. Helicopter pilot (Anti Submarine Warfare)

This allows you to provide an overall 'helicopter pilot's view' of your project. Unlike the standard jet pilot's view which doesn't allow for the hover (except the famous Harrier jump jet of course). It will enable you to keep tabs on all of your workstreams. When you detect a potentially hostile contact you can zoom in, go into the hover and deal with it. Having sorted it out you can then break your hover and resume patrol!

26.   Quality Assuror
Making regular spot checks on the quality of your team's outputs are very important; especially when it portrays the standards your project sets. You'll need naturally high standards yourself which should be a given. A good example is the project documentation produced, weekly reports and meeting outputs.

27.   Alchemist
Having the Midas touch will earn you instant recognition and respect. Whereas a magician produces something out of thin air, the alchemist produces gold from a basic metal that already exists - a priceless asset!

28.   Librarian
Not the most glamorous of roles but necessary all the same. It's one thing collecting all of your material for the future, but you still have to be able to access it fairly quickly often without prior notice. You don't necessarily have to know the answer straight away, but at least know where to find it.

29.   Painter & decorator
It's truly amazing what a lick of paint can do or a quick makeover to improve a project's appearance. Remember whether you're a true professional or DIY, the secret is in the preparation.

30.   Funeral director
Not a particularly pleasant task but somebody has to do it, like the post project clearing up exercise. You'll have to know when to and be prepared to lay a piece of work to rest. Show respect, compassion and understanding to the bereaved whilst at the same time being able to move on at the appropriate speed – life goes on.

31.   Bomb disposal expert
You need to be able to demonstrate a special kind of bravery and nerve when things don't quite go as well as expected. An old bomb may be unearthed (a previous issue) and needs diffusing. React quickly and remain calm as it could spell havoc for others in the short-term!

32.   Secret agent
Probably not as glamorous as we are led to believe. You probably won't get issued with some fancy or amazing gadgets to assist you. However, you may at sometime need to act in a discreet and subtle manner with a veil of secrecy for the sake of your project. You should still ensure you retain your usual high level of integrity though.

33.   Builder
You'll appreciate the finer arts of the construction industry and making a sound foundation for your construction. If you use cheap and shoddy materials and cut corners it will reflect in your end product.

The roles described above are obviously a light-hearted look at the wide-ranging skills needed. As a modern IT project manager you could not possibly expect to be fully proficient in each and every one of these disciplines. However, an understanding of the importance attached to each one will go a long way to helping you be successful.

If you would like more information on how you or your company can be more successful why not consider enlisting the help of somebody experienced in resolving these types of issues?

The benefits in making a small investment in your time and money and working closely with such an expert will start to show almost immediately and be repaid many times over.

Why Endeavour Strategies? Why Me? I offer an initial *free consultation.* We'll discuss your problems and explore the possibilities of working together and decide whether it's worthwhile moving on to the next stage. This can be done over the phone or a meeting – the choice is yours.

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Working together you'll benefit from my proven track record and unique blend of technical and managerial experience and knowledge gained from over thirty years and three successful careers in IT, Retail Management and the Royal Navy.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this article. Please feel free to recommend it to a friend or business colleague. Thanks again.

Yours faithfully,

Barry

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