



Job Description: Project Manager

In the sourcing, selection or candidacy for the role of Project Manager (“PM”) I become aware that other professional folk could do with a bit of help in making that job real to them. I and we at Phase 3 Consulting are asked what is and should be going on in the PM office. I have a personal respect for admirable sub-text about how therefore to engage with project management, or indeed perhaps as HR to act as a project manager when it’s not “in the training”.

To think in terms of project is certainly different. Whilst a PM role can be crafted contractually, logistically and semantically in different ways, to think in terms of project may be not a professional default but it has merit.

Here from me the formal (less so!) job description...

Read on to:

- Source and select a project manager as a project sponsor or recruiter
- Engage well with your PM within a project team
- Succeed in your candidacy and/or:
- Get to grips with acting as PM when it’s not your normal day job!

Outline:

In Project Management, you will manage and control change. Your key responsibility is to apply a set of techniques to plan, organise and implement a project. Your raison d'être is to see that project achieve its goals with the defined constraints that make a project just that.

Just quite how you do that depends on your methodology. For example, Prince 2 says you'll manage and control, whereas both the Project Management Institute (“PMI”) and the Association of Project Managers (“APM”) define your remit with focus on the application of knowledge, skills and prescribed techniques to achieve project objectives or requirements. This role will suit aspiring organisers and those fond of method and process detail, as well as great relationship-builders. If you're sold on the idea but less on the style and formula then “sprint” straight to agile. *(Please refer to the Role Responsibilities section below)*

Whilst your context may commonly be in the technology arena, consider a project to be any mission that is temporary, as distinct from the business as usual (“BAU”). It will have a defined start, close and change outcome to be arrived at. Projects bring together the management of resources human, financial, physical and technical and the control of parameters of scope, time, cost, quality and risk.

Phew. As the PM, there is a lot to handle, but the good news is that there is likely the powers to delegate fast and furious – plus no need to actually give direction. Leading a project as the Governor or Sponsor is not the same job (*and see our [Guide to Governance if you are a natural-born visionary](#)*). Upwards and downwards you have support.

The business organisation in which the PM engagement is made could be a service or product supplier business – for example to deliver an HR tech implementation - or the same organisation receiving the benefit of the project outcomes. This presents an apparent and immediate challenge in achieving role clarity, as there may well be counterparts to work with. Hmm.

Job Parameters:

Location:	Your geographical remit most likely reflects that of the project’s impact as well as your employment status. Many enjoy a home base and others may sit in a Project Management Office (“PMO”) – a group or office within the organisation dedicated to establishing the methods and seeing those carried out. Expect travel unless you’re on one site.
Hours:	Traditionally a full-time role. Client organisations can find it difficult to envisage the effective conduct of PM techniques on a part-time basis, yet an efficiency if so. Truly effective control systems enable this. Own the tasks and you will own your hours. Classically expect (foreseeable!) peak periods. Expect meetings (long ones!). Expect a good amount of on-the-road. Not a job for idlers.
Experience:	Formal training and accreditation is likely required where the method is accordingly defined (<i>see below</i>). As a recruiting team, look out for CV’s that demonstrate project metrics of similar scope, scale and sector. Delve into the detail about precise responsibilities personally handled – what supporting resources (human ones in particular!) is your PM expecting to access? Can your organisation deliver those or are you going to let each other down?
Salary:	My safe bet here is “according to experience” (<i>and see above</i>). I add a regard for risk factor and that means the organisational choice as to whether to employ a PM or use a contractor. Enticing daily rates in this world are accompanied by an unsettling lack of job security and this same market is holding on tight with IR35 and the like. Pressure’s on. If you insist on figures in absolute GDP then reported this year averages hitting Google headlines range from £39,518 to £62,500 per annum and are best read with caution or not at all ⁱ .

Reporting to:	You will report to the Project Board/Steering Group, who as a team will give you the scope within which you are OK to get on with the managing and controlling tasks. Note that in larger contexts, expect to report in to a Programme Manager, responsible for juggling various projects that relate to one another. At an individual level, your key decision-maker might be called the Project Governor, Executive or Sponsor. PM-ship is not about deciding or leading, but delivery.
Starting Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 80% of projects classified as high-performing use a certified PMⁱⁱ, but: ● The same survey reveals 23% are without accreditation ● 97% of organisations believe that PM is crucial to project successⁱⁱⁱ but something is amiss because: ● Barely a third of projects meet time and budget with 18% failing entirely^{iv}

Role Responsibilities:

Quite what you've got to do depends on the project management methodology that the PM role context suggests. Take care to distinguish what the PM can and does do (the method) from how they are trained (the accreditation). Acronyms abound, courses compete and professional parlance certainly serves to confuse. But in the UK, expect to come across the Association of Project Managers ("APM") as the leading body for professional recognition, the Project Management Institute ("PMI") as the global leader and good-old, UK-developed Prince 2. These within the context of formal techniques of course and remaining most common, but agile is on the up^v.

Let's look at some go-to options for the manager's technique toolkit and then a final nuts-and-bolts version. Applicants are frankly advised to check on expectations of method. The best applicants will tailor a method and certainly offer adaptability. Where not prescribed by your Board, client or employer, be prepared to bring your own:

The Methods

- *PMI and the PMBOK "Body of Knowledge"* – remaining the global front-runner on formal methodology for project management, provides a reference book detailing 5 standards, which are rather like the stages the PM must provide for: initiation, planning, execution, controlling and closing. PMI standards offer agreed terminology for the PM profession. A manager practising PMBOK technique has more detail on process how-to's in working with a "waterfall" technique. Waterfalls assume a flow of one (planned) step to the next, in sequence
- *Prince 2* – Prince 2 prescribes from start to finish, from principles (helpful ones!) to process detail. Well-known, well-trusted and well-grounded in the UK public sector, Prince sets up practitioners in their job. This job is defined as the management and control of every "stage" – initiating, controlling and delivering each stage, managing stage boundaries and closing. Carefully Prince 2 notes the PM's JD excludes the

directing of stages, this the job of the Board; happily, Prince 2 allows for “tailoring” to the context; thoughtfully, Prince 2 future-proofs itself by these days offering an agile method, too^{vi}....

- *Agile Methodologies* - developed from concepts in software development, agile techniques plan less ahead of time. The emphasis for agile project management is on response to change, collaboration and teamwork and a client focus. Your PM might manage with “scrum” tactics, but Scrum is just one example amongst many. Agile gives us some principles for this JD, but leaves open just quite what to do each day at work, for which look for a particular agile method choice or make up your own.
- *This job description is not necessarily exhaustive and post-holders may be required to work to other methodologies, such as are current at the time.....* If this is a line you’ve written in HR or read as a candidate then note it holds true of project management. The profession sees a shift from waterfall to agile, from formal to informal, and no doubt from UK-definition to the need-to-be-global. *Lean* methods – and you might have heard of *Six Sigma* – focus on tight quality control and lack of waste. How do parkour practitioners, white-water kayakers and volcano surfers^{vii} fancy the idea of *Extreme Programming (XP or EP method)*?

The Nuts and Bolts

My nuts-and-bolts on the role responsibilities of the project manager do assume a ready-salted approach and context. That is, one that remains more likely to be the flavour for your own world of work in HR or HR tech. Here is what to expect of yourself as PM, or of your chosen PM candidate.

The post-holder will:

- *Start a project* safely, by compiling initiation documentation and forming project team roles
- Make and maintain a *project plan*, including identifying work tasks to be done, resources required to do them, dates and therefore critical dependencies, which are the reliances that each of these factors have upon one another
- *Manage human resources*, by working out requisite skills, availability and resource clashes or capacity demand or deficits. In a matrix structure, they may line manage project team members, at least in a functional capacity
- Manage financial resources, tracking a *budget* and providing financial update reports
- *Safeguard risks*. Typically, risks are identified, together with their mitigations and monitored using a risk management tool. The PM will highlight when risks threaten to become issues:
- *Highlight issues* where the project has extended outside of the parameters that the project Board, Steering Group or leader has given. The manager will then request decisions to be made to keep matters under control

- Look out for quality by applying *quality control* processes. These are systems for quality assurance, making sure each job matches expectations. There will be tools and tactics for checking, testing and recording delivery
- Take care of stakeholders. *Stakeholder management* requires the adept handling of multi-disciplinary teams and personnel at different organisational levels, both within the structure of formal communications and informal relationships
- Work with external stakeholders, and note that two PM's may find one another working together – one from a partner company and one inside the end-user company. Clearly delineated and identified roles are key to success, as well as the essential recognition that all share common project objectives. Recruiters to the project team please note: do you?
- *Manage those in project support*, where applicable, affordable and appropriate to the scale of the change project. This team beefs up the resource capability that the PM alone can manage and control
- Compile *reports*, the definition of which will depend on method, or the devising of agreed preferences at the project start
- The PM may chair *Board meetings*, but more likely is tasked to gather and to bring materials for that key stakeholder get-together, including recommendations at each step and stage
- *Close things down*. Just as imperative as the project start is the project close. Think of each as a form of handover: the former into the project team's delivery hands, the latter from the project team and back to those operational

Person Specification:

I'm not one for a hefty essentials list on the HR person specification. Drag off the net ample examples of the real thing and assess for yourself, given your reading, what in your stakeholder perspective and in your context, you really need to include.

Instead consider this your sense-check and your list of my top tips to getting this role right. Consider too that over 60% of project failures are accounted for by factors within internal control^{viii}.

<p>Experience and Qualification</p>	<p>Essential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proven capability to do the job. What is the job? To manage and control. Have they managed and controlled project-work of like scope and scale? Is there evidence if not, that they can do so? • Qualification according to method: the most common certification^{ix} is from the PMI, with next up Prince 2 or an internal accreditation <i>or</i> • Demonstrable delivery of own method or tailored method. Please bear in mind that a trend towards the agile is suggestive that we'll accredit less and tailor more <p>Desirable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CV metrics of not only on equivalent scale and method, but in sector and technical scope. A bonus if – in a systems or supplier environment – particular parties and products are known quantities to the PM • Exposure to (ask for comment and comparison on!) a range of methods and environments helps to keep the focus on impactful PM and avoids the silo. A methodology can serve as a boxed set; that there is an “out of the box” is an understanding that the best PM will share with you • Foundational training or own learning about PM concepts. Look for evidence a PM is a thinker, learner, self-improver
<p>Skills and Competencies</p>	<p>Essential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A love and joy for control and organisation, project management offering a role where for its own sake the controller is the asset. This with: • Meticulous focus on detail, process and perfection. The PM who takes the “oh well” attitude is the PM out of their right talent pool and into a whole tank of hot water. Yet: • Beware the PM professional who cannot delegate and trust. Manage and control is not the same as do. All. Watching for perfect detail is not the same as delivering every detail and they work in conflict • Great people skills, most notably the ability to engage effectively with different levels in organisational hierarchy, with different functional disciplines and with differing perspectives. This person needs strong communication links

	<p>Desirable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tool-kit: a method offering, or a self-developed library, of templates for the control tools the role requires, including project plans, logs and reports • A partner network, as the PM acting alone attracts a higher risk to the role. Networks can be fellow professionals, a company team and/or in part derived from membership of one of the leading institutes • A lack of assumption about job title. Focussing on impact allows a recognition that effective practice can be delivered through project management under a different guise. Look at what is to be done and how, not what we call it^x. • The ideal candidate offers strength, stamina and resilience and yet in appreciation of a clear line between management and leadership. Can the PM describe that line? Can they adapt if it's not quite where you draw it? In this partnership will both project leaders and managers share a mutual role respect for the division?
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How to apply:

If you'd like to understand more about project management in your own context or to quiz an HR professional or technical consultant about how to make project management fit the bill in your office, then do:

- Contact [Phase 3 Consulting](#). Give us a call (0800 321 3032) and ask about what you should do. Check out the [Insights](#) blogs and articles for more explanations about technology translated for those in HR, Finance and IT, as well as for would-be consultants
- Get active on Linked In. In this profession, the forum serves professionals and clients really well. Connect with me [here](#) and ask for more deciphering
- Interested candidates I recommend to some of the material referenced in this article and particularly that you gain a grounding in at least one of the formal methods before any choice to, yes, sprint to agile. Read well and widely^{xi}.

Wherever change is to be created and the likelihood of successful achieving secured, then management, control and delivery are on that critical path to success. This job description I advocate you apply. Tailoring techniques is the twist which allows you to make individual, project and organisational choice find your own relevance.

ⁱ Reed and CW Jobs salary benchmark research in 2017 respectively and bear in mind for each the respective applicant base from which taken. I prefer the figures found from organisations of wider reach, such as Glassdoor (£45,675). These are national values too

ⁱⁱ “Insights and Trends: Current Programme and Project Management Practices 2012”, PricewaterhouseCoopers

ⁱⁱⁱ PWC, 2012

^{iv} “CHAOS Research Report”, The Standish Group, 2013

^v Whilst the PWC 2012 statistics returned PMI as the most common method in current practice, with Prince 2 or internal methods in second place, the most recent research I’ve found by the PMI themselves in 2017 reports 71% of organisations using agile methods at least “sometimes” (“Pulse of the Profession”, PMI (Project Management Institute))

^{vi} Developed in 2016 a new programme, Agile Prince 2, aims to offer the best of Prince 2 process and the benefits of agile – showing that the defined techniques can be applied within shorter stage timeframes and not necessarily in sequence

^{vii} These are apparently amongst the top 10 most extreme sports. Count me out.

^{viii} PWC, 2012: the top 4 reasons being bad estimates, missed deadlines, scope changes and insufficient resourcing

^{ix} PWC, 2012

^x At Phase 3 Consulting, in certain contexts we will advise on a Lead Consultancy role that combines the requires of project management with a greater degree of own technical delivery. We may also adapt techniques to achieve PM-ship by teamwork.

^{xi} Here is one of the great online read about methodologies that is very manageable -

<http://www.thedigitalprojectmanager.com/project-management-methodologies-made-simple/#xp>. However, I do advocate and return frequently to a detailed textbook and my own is the “Managing Successful Projects with Prince 2”.

Kate Wadia *Kate’s passion at work is for bridging the gap between technology and people at work, translating for HR professionals the language of HR systems and making meaningful their potential. She believes that success with people technology is through people and that people are the differentiator. Using simple techniques drawn from HR experience, project management, business psychology and analogy with everyday life, Kate presents and explains how to work well with technology and technology projects in an HR leadership role. With a background in contrasting private and public sector HR management, Kate developed her thinking in seeking for herself to understand her first HR systems project-work. Currently she leads the Service Delivery for Phase 3 Consulting, offering an independent take on the HR systems market in the UK, through a network of experts. Kate’s guiding principle is that openness offers knowledge-sharing, credibility and trust. Incurably enthusiastic and up absurdly early for a working morning, she swears that she only drinks three good coffees a day, but nobody believes her! Kate also writes as an [HR Zone](#) columnist.*

