



The Six Essential Skills that Define PM Leaders

You're a PMP® with some experience under your belt. Maybe you've led a major project and applied some leadership skills to your assignments. But something tells you there is more out there than just the mechanics of your job. You have ideas worth spreading that require a certain set of skills you have yet to master.

Do you want to move beyond the technical inner workings of your profession to be able to see, understand and innovate within the bigger picture? These six essential strategic business skills will take you from being a tactical mechanic to a PM leader.

The essential element to becoming a PM leader lies within your ability to see the links between strategy and execution. To succeed you need to hone your ability to zoom your perspective in—and out—as the situation demands.

The Essential Strategic Business Skills to Rev Your PM Engine

- 1. Managing Alignment**—Everything you do needs to be aligned to your organizational culture, strategy, structure and internal politics. Managing alignment requires understanding how to move your project, team, products and organization in concert and knowing that not everything will be aligned at all times and how and when to realign. For example, an IT project requires a change in behavior by both the end user and management. The advanced leader knows how to drive the alignment and sees it needs to begin at the start of the project.
- 2. Becoming an Interpreter**—Like a language translator, the advanced leader has the ability to read between the lines to understand and interpret the data within the right context. Interpreting requires the ability to pull disparate pieces of information from various sources to see the picture

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from different perspectives. For example, a project status report contains subjective data based on the team's perspective. The advanced leader can interpret the subjective data by taking in all the perspectives, convert the information to have meaning from his or her perspective and interpret it for someone else who may have a different perspective.

- 3. Learning to Innovate**—It is easy to be innovative when you are in a start-up, but most organizations are more mature and process-oriented. The advanced leader knows when and how to bend or conform to the rules to pursue an innovative idea that is aligned to the overall business strategy. For example, a headphone manufacturer decides to test their products on celebrity musicians instead of using the traditional scientific approach. As a result, the company receives not only celebrity endorsements, but also develops a great product that is based on real-life experience. The advanced leader knows when to go out on a limb—while managing risks—to achieve better business results.
- 4. Thinking Ahead**—Any chess master will tell you that you must always think several moves ahead of your opponent. Anticipating trends and how they might impact the business is a crucial skill for any leader. For example, a linens manufacturer identifies the negative impact of rising cotton prices in China. The advanced leader will closely monitor the market to anticipate what will happen in the next six months and how to minimize collateral damage as a result of that trend.
- 5. Leveraging Networks**—Effective networking and communication is an obvious skill set for any manager. The advanced leader needs to learn how to leverage the networks he or she has already built. For example, a veteran nurse is assigned to implement a new medical billing system at the hospital where she works. Because she has spent years building rapport and trust with the entire team of doctors, she is able to leverage her network to introduce the new system within a few weeks. The advanced leader knows how to lead change from the middle.

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6. Making the Right Decisions—Business is about making money. If you don't understand the market drivers, you can't make smart business decisions. The advanced leader understands how to take action based on a deep understanding of both local and global financial trends. This skill assimilates all five of the above skills. The advanced leader makes informed, innovative decisions that are aligned to the business strategy, interpreted for the appropriate audience, based on anticipated trends and executed through the right channels. For example, a major technology component company had a need to engage with a younger generation, making the decision to acquire a hip headphone manufacturer rather than creating the next best thing. The advanced leader can identify the alignment between the two products, interpret the market trend for the short and the long term, innovate to acquire rather than create, and leverage their networks to have the courage to make the right business decisions.

Books, mentors and real-life experience can help you acquire these skills over time. Or you can take the fast track to advanced leadership through a training program designed around the essential strategic business skills to advance your leadership potential.

The Stanford Advanced Project Management (SAPM) program will shift your perspective from the micro-view of project and program management to the macro-view, giving you the strategic business skills to advance you to the great leader you were meant to be.

For more information about the program, visit ipslearning.com/SAPM.

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