

# Project Management Series

## SPOTLIGHT ON TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS



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### Morteza Amiri

**P.Eng., M.Sc., MBA-SEE, PMP**

Engineering services project manager, **trajectorE**

**Education** – B.Sc. (Chem. Eng.)'09, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; M.Sc. (Chem. Eng.)'11, Sharif University of Technology; MBA-SEE'20 Memorial University; Project Management Professional (PMP); P. Eng.

**Experience** – Morteza has been working as a chemical engineer for 11 years and has experience working in Iran, Turkey, Russia and Canada. Morteza has worked on projects in the oil and gas, mining and technology sectors. He has worked as project manager on several different projects. Now, he is a member of the pre-commissioning and commissioning project team that is working in Saskatchewan on a co-generation site where he is tasked with testing all equipment and systems to ensure they are functional and safe for the client to begin operations.



MORTEZA AMIRI

#### How did you first get involved with project management?

The first time I was introduced to project management was when I started my professional career as an engineer in Iran, revamping a copper smelting complex. The project's purpose was to replace existing industrial hoods and air infiltration at the smelting unit to prevent air pollution. Minimizing the downtime of copper production to minimize the financial loss was the biggest challenge of the work.

I needed to prioritize tasks in proper technical order, identify and allocate the right resources to each task, communicate with the client and plant operation team, and adjust the plan in a way that overlapped with the overhaul and maintenance time of the plant. Identifying the prerequisites and temporary changes were my major duties in the project team. I was assigned work that required using Microsoft Project, and I had no knowledge of how to use the program. I took a crash course to supplement my knowledge.

But it wasn't easy. Later, in Iran, on a multi-million dollar industrial project in oil and gas refineries, chemicals and petrochemicals plants and mining projects, I learned that project management is more than just project planning. It is only the tip of the iceberg!

#### Why did you pursue a MBA in social enterprise and entrepreneurship (MBA-SEE) and project management certification?

Project managers need to know more than just how to plan what is required for a project. I had taken specific courses as needed throughout my career but it was a reactive approach, and I wanted to be proactive. So, after almost 10 years as a chemical engineer, I decided to take my MBA-SEE to help develop the knowledge and hone the soft skills I needed to be a successful project manager and also learn about social enterprise.

The MBA-SEE program helped me build a solid foundation of knowledge regarding project management, human resources

and information systems. Upon graduation with my MBA-SEE degree, I decided to complete my PMP certification to further build skills in conflict resolution, leadership, team building, motivating employees and management theories. I found that studying for the PMP helped me to integrate my management knowledge and apply it to the management of projects.

I am glad I didn't postpone getting my PMP certification because that additional knowledge is beneficial now. It is just the beginning of my journey in this field, and more practical experience will fill the gaps.

***“Project management education gave me the road map to successfully complete projects. While each project is different, the outline is the same. This information and the skills I have learned are transferrable to any industry.”***

#### **How does managing projects differ between countries? How can knowledge of project management help with these differences?**

The main differences are because of differences in work culture and communication preferences because team building and motivational factors highly depend on them. For example, working on a project where overtime was not welcomed, we couldn't accelerate the project through an overtime payment incentive. Instead, we had to outsource some time-sensitive tasks.

#### **What are the most important skills a project manager should have?**

The primary skills that a project manager should have are effective communication, negotiation and conflict resolution, time management, risk management and critical thinking. All these skills are required daily while working as a project manager. For example, some risks can put the project in danger, and without a proper contingency plan, risks can become a crisis. A crisis can quickly become a fatal disaster for the project if left unmanaged.

***“The primary reason projects fail is due to communication mishaps, not technical reasons, so communication skills are very important.”***

#### **What are the most challenging and rewarding aspects of project management?**

One of the most challenging aspects of project management is receiving impractical deadlines from clients. I also find that

scope creep, which is when the client changes their mind about aspects of the project after the original plan has been created, can be incredibly challenging. I find that following project management methodologies can help alleviate these challenges' impact and keep the project on track.

The most rewarding aspect of working on projects is participating in knowledge-sharing sessions when co-workers share information and lessons learned about their projects' experiences. This knowledge-sharing helps others deal with similar situations or problems in the future more easily. I also enjoy working in a constantly changing environment and continuous learning. A changing environment allows for the development of skills, which promotes knowledge growth as different situations and challenges present themselves.

#### **What advice do you have for people looking to explore project management in your field?**

I encourage anyone coming out of school to get the PMP or CAPM certificate because it shows potential employers that you care about self-improvement and are willing to invest in yourself.

Secondly, focus on soft skills (mainly engineers), especially communication and interpersonal skills. Having the ability and skills to negotiate and resolve conflicts effectively is essential.

Finally, team building helps keep the team motivated and committed. These are fundamental skills to develop and can be developed through work experiences, volunteer roles or through team sports or other activities.

## Contact us

Dr. Jennifer Jewer, PMP  
Faculty of Business Administration  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
Em: [jenniferj@mun.ca](mailto:jenniferj@mun.ca)

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