

SAP PROJECT MANAGER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While it's true SAP projects come in different shapes and sizes, a high degree of success can be attributed to being aware of and controlling issues and risks, both external and internal, as well as foreseen and unforeseen. Any SAP project requires quality resources – be it the right personnel, adequate IT or systems, a solid budget, appropriate onboarding materials, etc. A seasoned SAP project manager is one who recognizes these resource needs and sets the process in place for finding and addressing them.

Planning is an essential task for any project, hence the adage, “If you fail to plan, you will plan to fail” holds true. An SAP project manager is someone who notably has an overall view and knowledge of the project on hand and understands the project goals, the business value, the ROI, and the reasons it was approved. They should visualize the end-to-end execution and should be skilled and capable of foreseeing pitfalls and hurdles even before they occur, mitigating them so that they don't hinder the progress of the project or become barriers to success.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Based on our experience managing hundreds of successful projects of many types, below are a few of the roles and responsibilities of the seasoned SAP project manager:



Ensures Compliance

- Ensures the team's compliance with all accounting, human resources, training, and safety goals, as outlined by the Statement of Work (SOW) and other policies and procedures that exist at the company. Companies require adherence to their internal guidelines for business conduct, ethics, information security, and general safety in demanding work environments. Ensuring all SAP project team members comply with and adhere to the client's working environment becomes the responsibility of the project manager, lest key resources are asked to leave simply because they haven't complied with the training requirements in a timely manner and thereby put the project (and client) at risk.
- Manages the timely submission of time and expenses to the client, consistently, to stay on schedule and on or under budget.



Facilitates Success

- Keeps upper management and stakeholders informed about the progress of the project as well as any risks or deviations from the plan. Communication and transparency are keys to the success of a project. As such, the PM should have a process in place to inform management and stakeholders on the progress of the project, risks, and issues, if any, and steps considered to mitigate or resolve them. These could be through status meetings and collaborative tools.
- Schedules and conducts weekly team meetings to ensure the scope of work is clear and that a standard operating procedure is in place so that all team members are on the same page at any given point in time. The quantity and quality of work performed could be impacted by extraneous factors. Ensuring the team has an overall understanding of what is being done and what is expected will help in moving the project along with fewer surprises. Such meetings will also help communicate to the team any policy or procedure changes, change(s) in scope, or new member introductions to name a few. This also offers an opportunity to recognize achievements and thereby boost individual and team morale.

- Plans weekly one-on-one meetings with key team members, often leads, to track progress and address issues or concerns affecting the team, whether those challenges are internal or external. Knowing the progress of each team member and what impedes progress will help the PM to remove barriers. This dialog can also help improve individuals' efficiency and foster individual accountability.
- Works actively with the product sponsor in developing the product backlog and entering it into the Agile toolset to ensure a seamless implementation. With the advent of newer project methodologies, there's a paradigm shift in how SAP project planning and execution is carried out. SAP Project enablers, such as SAP Activate, embed an agile/scrum framework to plan and execute projects. These call for developing the product backlog, working with product owners, and sizing and executing them in sprints through short iterative design, development, and testing cycles.



Possesses Technical Knowledge

- Possesses a high-level understanding of both the existing and future technical landscape and the functional design and architecture of the project. Whether it's a greenfield or brownfield implementation, knowing the underlying technologies of databases and applications vis-à-vis the various facets of SAP S/4HANA to carry out a system or technical conversion would help to enumerate tasks, identify resources required, and plan the time and effort to deliver. In other words, they help to develop a solid project plan.
- Seeks information about the application, systems, databases, and integrations, and provides it to the team to build out the target architecture. No enterprise is devoid of the complexities posed by a spaghetti network of systems and applications. Understanding this is very important for an SAP PM, as they plan out a digital transformation project that could be led by the implementation of SAP S/4HANA and one or more of SAP's cloud applications.
- Understands SAP's project tool framework and adheres to best practices for project management. They are well-versed and certified in using SAP Activate, RISE with SAP, and SAP Cloud ALM, and can blend it with the agile/scrum framework to meet project needs. Every organization has its own flavor of project methodologies that suit its operational and execution styles. However, when it comes to implementing SAP projects, it's better suited to stay close to SAP's approach using proven methods like RISE with SAP when transitioning to the cloud, as it allows you to do so with less risk and without compromise to keep your project on track.
- Prioritizes project closure activities and conducts a lessons-learned meeting post-implementation to reflect on areas of strength and improvement moving forward. As with any project management practice, conducting a lessons-learned session with the project team helps document the things that went well and things that need improvement. This will prove as a guide for future projects and improve execution and reduce the incidence of fallout and errors.



Solves Problems

- Coordinates or escalates to resolve task blockers interfering with the flow of the project. Let's say there's a licensing issue that could have an adverse effect on the timeline of the project. Knowing that ahead of time, based on previous experience, and tracking down the resource(s) who would be able to sort out the issue will help mitigate the impact that could otherwise escalate to a showstopper.
- Knows the skills needed to staff the project with the right resources, at the right times, for the specific needs. Throughout its lifecycle, a project goes through several phases requiring different skilled resources to complete the associated tasks. Knowing that the onboarding of resources has a lead time, preparing to find and recruit the resources in time is an important responsibility of the SAP project manager. Having a resource too early or late in a phase can adversely affect the budget and cost of the project.

- Creates self-service onboarding resources for new resources as they join the project. Creating and having available, easy-to-use, and easy-to-understand digital resources allows a PM to walk a new team member through the onboarding process at any point during the project. These resources cover items such as badging, pre-qualification training and tests required by the client, security policies and procedures, and time reporting to name a few.



Offers Guidance and Insights

- With a 360-degree view of the project tasks at hand, the SAP PM recognizes the critical path and project slack time (time you can delay a task without delaying the project) to prioritize those tasks and events to stay on schedule.
- Inquires about and embraces the client project methodologies and tools where necessary. A client's standard PMO practice could be leveraging software management software and methodologies that may be different from SAP PM's preferences before entering the project. For example, a company could be invested in using project and documentation products from a specific vendor, and the PM will need to quickly adapt to that software and methods when necessary.
- Provides insight into best practice tools and methodologies for the project at hand and possesses familiarity with any of the Agile tools. There could be instances where the client could be using rudimentary methods to manage their projects. The PM can offer advice based on the needs of the client and suggest the right tools to use to achieve the project's goals.



Builds Teams

- Builds the ultimate team, serving as a guide to team members and aiding them in their own skill and knowledge development. In any project, the SAP PM works to keep the team informed of significant developments, directs on trainings, and boosts team morale during critical times.
- Encourages collaboration between resources and teams to establish strong working relationships and ensure successful project implementation. For example, by tagging team members and setting up a buddy system, the project manager can ensure that there are good relationships within the team.

SAP Project Management

While these serve as guidelines for defining the roles and responsibilities of an SAP project manager, every project may have its own nuances in the form of scope redefinition, functionality, adaptiveness, resource challenges, timelines, prioritization of requirements, and more. It's the experience and ability of an astute project manager who inertly understands and foresees the complexity and risks posed and mitigates them with timely course-correcting actions that ensure reaching the finish line with little ramifications.

At Clarkston, we are diligent about exceeding our clients' expectations regarding SAP project management. While not rocket science, there's an art to project management that can only be achieved through decades upon decades of experience and having built your own methodology and set of accelerators to serve as the platform on which to build a tailored approach for each project. Please reach out to learn more about our project management expertise and capabilities, particularly if you're looking for guidance with your next SAP implementation.

