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Project management for engineering and construction

At 1,271 feet (387 meters) and counting, the towering structure at One World Trade Center in Manhattan's financial district is the city's tallest building, casting a shadow over even the famous Empire State Building, just a hop, skipping and jumping uptown. Built on the site of the original World Trade Center, the building is a testament to American resilience, not to mention the country's amazing ability to... great things to build. That's right, this glass-enclosed monolith didn't quite germinate off the sidewalk by itself: Since 2006, a massive construction crew has been working hard to raise the world's newest skyscraper [source: Washington Post]. At the helm of this and every other hard hat project, from cementing a parking lot to building an apartment complex, is a construction project manager (PM). The PM has the primary responsibility of planning a particular construction job and monitoring progress along the way. The feature typically requires at least one associate's degree - some require a four-year engineering degree - and five (ish) years of experience in a related area. The experience pays off: PMs earn about \$84,000 a year and their employment prospects are expected to grow by about 17 percent this decade [source: Bureau of Labor Statistics]. Read on for an overview of a prime minister's responsibilities in carrying out a construction project. Content Before the first nail is hammered, the Prime Minister must plan the work that his or her crew will actually do. The PM is looking at a proposed project to determine how and when the work will be carried out, including preparatory work to be completed before the building begins. The Prime Minister's cost estimate is important because it determines at what price the Prime Minister's company will offer its services. The PM also develops a deliverables scheme to create a roadmap that the construction team must stick to to complete the job in a timely and cost-effective manner (two other PM responsibilities). And the construction manager needs to look at the project thoroughly to be willing to handle tasks that come along the way [sources: Exforsys, Hendrickson]. Ad On a construction site, the Prime Minister is in charge. The project leader is not only responsible for planning the work and ensuring that it is done, but also overseeing the hard hats that do it. That means coordinating and directing the efforts of construction workers. It also means hiring, disciplining and perhaps even firing those who step out of line (or those who, like Vito Spatafore in *The Sopranos*, spend more time sipping coffee, thumbing through a newspaper and doing unexpected things in the then lifting a hammer) [source: Exforsys]. Ad In other words, it's the Prime Minister's job to get the job done through other people. In this and in many other ways, the PM is no different than a manager in another position field, field, it's the globe-trotting Ringling Bros Circus or a paperclip sales outfit in Sheboygan, WI. They want you to cook dinner, at least they should let you shop for some of the groceries, legendary NFL coach Bill Parcells once famously said about his desire to be involved in choosing the players for his teams. For construction project managers, the sentiment also applies when it comes to selecting the tools and equipment used to get the job done. The people the Prime Minister oversees are worthless without the proper tools. The Prime Minister needs to obtain the equipment and supplies - from nails to bulldozers - needed to complete the project, not to mention finding a place to store it and implement a method of keeping inventory. It is important that the PM thoroughly engages in this aspect of the job, keeping costs within budget, while also ensuring that no time will be lost waiting for additional equipment or repairs once construction begins [sources: Exforsys, Hendrickson, Shaker]. A construction PM's ad may not drill one hole, twist screws and hammer nails, but it is his or her responsibility to ensure that all the work is done properly, on time and within expected costs. The PM typically sets specific project goals after the contract with the owner (client) is signed. The PM assesses the contractual terms of performance - requirements and deliverables - to determine exactly what work needs to be performed to comply with the contract. He or she then sets costs and time goals as well as micro-objectives for the realization of different phases of construction. Based on these objectives, the PM determines the number of employees and types of supplies and materials needed to reach them [source: Shaker]. Ad Veteran hard hats often refer to a construction project as any collection of vaguely related activities that are ninety percent complete, over budget and late [source: Shaker]. A particular task usually comes with a very specific set of objectives and limitations, where the time in which it must be completed is an important goal. The period is important because the construction contract often contains fines against the builder in the event that the project expires too late. Time, indeed, is money [source: Hendrickson]. Advertisement To meet a total construction deadline, the Prime Minister must set a specific schedule with a number of deadlines for the various projects to be completed. The Prime Minister also needs to review the work on a daily basis to ensure it progresses in a timely manner. If there is a delay - whether due to the weather, an accident or just a task that takes longer than expected - the PM needs changes to get the track back on track [sources: Exforsys, Shaker]. That brand spankin' new strip mall may be a pretty sight, but it's unlikely that an abundance of construction workers put their blood, sweat and tears to tears building the joint from some deep-seated artistic or creative passion for raising single level malls. A construction project is usually a commercial effort. For example, the Prime Minister must keep money in mind while overseeing work. Before work begins, the Prime Minister will carry out cost estimates - taking into account wages, equipment and materials - to help set a budget. Cost projection is a crucial aspect of the project management of the construction, because it determines under what parameters not only the work will be done, but also on which the financial success of the project will be determined [source: Shaker]. Ad As soon as the project starts, the Prime Minister must make sure his crew doesn't overrun the budget. He therefore monitors costs on a daily or at least weekly basis, compares the costs incurred with the estimates and limits or eliminates the costs if necessary to stay below budget [source: Shaker]. On a construction site, the Prime Minister may be the boss, but he serves two masters: the construction company that employs him and the client for whom a particular project is being built. The Prime Minister is expected to keep both sides informed of the ongoing process and any hiccups coming along the way. This is usually done by compiling a variety of internal and external reports regarding track status, equipment, policies and procedures, along with a host of other issues. For example, if there is a problem that changes the construction schedule, the PM should notify the customer of the situation, project how it is expected to affect timing and cost, and specify any planned adjustments [sources: Exforsys, Shaker]. Ad The PM role often also requires a project manager to put on and whistle an imaginary referee's shirt, racking up all sorts of disputes. Whether it's between fellow construction workers or subcontractors or the customer, an unresolved dispute can throw a rod into the smooth-running engine that is the PM's construction project. When dealing with disputes between employees, the key to a successful solution is to nip a disagreement in the bud. This requires clear preventive measures and effective mechanisms for resolving conflicts that inevitably arise [source: Exforsys]. Ad Disputes with customers, which may arise above schedule goals, performance guarantees, or deviations from the original contract terms, should be handled carefully to ensure a smooth working relationship throughout the duration of the project. An unresolved dispute can lead to significant legal costs and delay a project by taking workers out near the task at hand to focus on resolving the dispute. In dealing with these conflicts, a prime minister should try to resolve them quickly and informally - get the right technical input if necessary - and keep the job moving [source: Federal Facilities Council]. The contract between the owner and the builder builder describes all the work that needs to be done and it is therefore necessary for the Prime Minister to be involved in drafting them and to be well acquainted with the requirements to ensure that these requirements are met [source: Exforsys]. But this is not the only agreement that a PM should manage to ensure that the project goes without a hitch. Architects, material suppliers and subcontractors (electricians, carpenters and heating and cooling professionals, for example) can also be found and brought into the fold. The PM should oversee agreements with each of these parties on the various pieces of the construction project puzzle that they will complete [sources: Exforsys, Shaker]. Ad An essential part of problem solving is risk management; that is, limiting the amount of problems that will need to be shot. A wide range of factors involve potential risks in a construction project: conditions on the ground; design assumptions; public regulations; safety of workers; and environmental considerations and regulations, to name but a few. As a result of the increasing number of risks, owners have assumed that they share them by requiring a builder to be at least partially liable in the event of loss due to these factors [source: Hendrickson]. It is therefore the Prime Minister's job to analyse risks in the project so that both the builder and the customer are aware of this and can reach a mutual agreement on how the risk is shared. Once construction is underway, the PM should try to mitigate the risks by carefully selecting materials and equipment and closely monitoring the work being carried out [source: Hendrickson]. Do you know how to expand an existing deck? Keep reading to learn the right way to expand an existing deck. Those guys are having all the fun. In addition to whistling and making inappropriate comments to various passers-by, construction workers get to spend their days outdoors - or at least outside - using their hands to actually make something. If you're a project manager, the job also comes with a pretty decent salary. Meanwhile, I keep working my sun color in a pasty white hue while staring at a computer screen for hours at a time. Sure, a construction job can mean early mornings and back break work endured through several seasons of severe weather, but the grass is always greener on the other side of the barbed wire fence. Related Articles Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Outlook Handbook: Construction Managers. 26 April 2012 (6 May 2012) and Maqsood, Tayyab. A qualitative approach in problem-solving process tracing of construction site engineers. 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