

Essentials of Project Management

The task of a project manager is a very exciting one. You become member of an exclusive club of people who can order others to do stuff while they themselves get the credit. Furthermore, you often get things the way you want them since you are the person in charge. On the other hand it's also your responsibility to ensure the project is on track and your ass is on the line if it goes wrong. It's also your job to make sure that your team is in high spirits and not on the edge of breaking apart (both as a group and as individuals.)

The Author

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He has been larping since 1992, and has been involved in many LARP organisations and projects since 1994. He is one of the few people to have attended all Knudepunkts and he is the Project manager of KPO3.

Four basic tasks

The project managers job consists of four basic elements: planning, communicating, coordinating and checking up. I will not go into very detailed descriptions of these here since you will find tons of books in your local store concerning these subjects. The basics of the four basic elements are as follows:

- **Planning-**
Making and changing plans, from the first day with the vague idea to the last evaluation meeting, for the projects tasks.
- **Communicating-**
Since you're the main profile of the project everything you say, concerning the project, in public forums are important. So think about it before you say it.
- **Coordinating-**
To make sure the team is working and talking together and that there is nothing interfering with the team dynamics. It's extremely important that the
- **Checking up-**
Making sure that everyone is working as planned.

This following is seven simple pieces of advice that I have picked up while managing larp and other cultural project. Some of them are directly related to the four basic tasks and some of them are crossovers or about the things that happen to you personally. It's not everything you need to know, but it's a start.

1. Do not do any actual work.

It's very important that you stay focused on planning, coordinating, communicating and checking up. Very hands on tasks with strict deadlines (like writing backgrounds or renting cars and toilets) will stress you and make you loose your focus.

This of course means you will have to rely on others to do the actual work. You have to convince yourself that others can do as good a job as yourself. Trust me they can! But don't be surprised if they do it in another way then you would have done it. People have different capabilities; that's what makes you a great team. The only thing to do is to accept and embrace it. This of course leads to you needing

to take the leader role. Don't be afraid of taking this role. It's often not very funny to whip your closest friends to make a deadline, but it's necessary. If you as a team have decided that you are the project manager, everyone should be able to accept it. And if you or anyone else has a problem with it, the conflict should be taken and dealt with, not avoided (see advice 5.)

2. Let the project be a part of you

You have to involve yourself in the project. Let it get under your skin, let it in your dreams, be a part of it and let it be a part of you. Don't plan on doing much working or studying in the last weeks before a large project. It's vital



that you can use all of your mental capabilities to focus on the project. Tell your girl/boyfriend not to expect your full attention and remember to make up for it afterwards. Getting a project under your skin isn't something that happens from day one. It takes time, but as you're closing in on a project and meeting all of those deadlines you will feel it come creeping upon you. Welcome it.

3. Communication and Documentation

Nothing can destroy a good project like bad communication. The

stressful situations you will have a plan to hold on to instead of nothing. If it never becomes stressful and you don't need the plans...well then you're a good planner. Remember that plans



members of the team have to talk to each other and you have to facilitate that. If they don't it will lead to bad chemistry as no one will know what the others are working on and it will lead to wasted or redundant work. Make everyone writes statuses of their work and distributes it through mail, icq, meetings and social gatherings. Remember that some people are not online all the time. These people will very quickly feel alienated from the group, so call them instead. Also remember to encourage the team members to speak to each other instead of through you; this will cause you less stress.

4. Everything can be planned

Make plans for and write even the smallest and most obvious things down. Make lists of assignments: who is doing them, when are the deadlines and other important information. It might feel odd in the situation because the plans seem so obvious, but in

can be changed if the foundation of the decision changes. Also remember that very few people like being told in detail what to do. It's important that you involve the people who are actually going to do the work in the planning, since this will become a very big motivating factor for them. They are hopefully experts on their own tasks and are therefore more likely to make the deadline they themselves set.

5. Learn to like conflicts

Before you really get started working make sure that everybody is in agreement on what kind of project you are doing. The first meetings should be about agreeing on visions for the project. A lot of energy and time consuming conflicts will be avoided if the team has taken the time to discuss the goals early. In the beginning of a project a disagreement will be about a certain specific matter. Later in projects disagreements will often turn

into personal conflicts, because a lot of blood, sweat and tears might already be put into this specific matter. The lesson learned is to deal with conflicts as early as possible; time will not make them go away! As the project manager the role as the peacekeeper naturally belongs to you, and this is why you can't be afraid of conflict.

6. You are working with amateurs

It is likely that all of you are either studying or working and that the larp project is organized in your precious spare time. Take this into consideration when the group is deciding on the level of ambition and remember it when somebody doesn't make a deadline. Accept that people have other jobs and make the best of the time they want to give. Always remember to tell the team that they're doing a good job. They probably are and it's most likely all the credit they are going to get.

7. Show me the money

You have to take an interest in the projects economy. Most of the time you will have a person assigned to the task of handling the money, but sometimes you won't and then you are stuck with it. Even though you might have someone to handle the paperwork you still need to take an interest. There will most likely come a time when there will have to be decisions made on how to use the little money you have. And since you have a special interest in the project, you are the most competent person

to do it. Sometimes, like if you get a lot of funding, you will also be legally responsible and then you must take interest.

Like a lot of other things, project management is something you learn by doing. Observing others behaviours in projects you're working on will tell you a lot even if you're not the project manager. The only way to get better is to do it again and again and again. And please do: all the hard working larp enthusiasts deserve a good project manager who cares and knows what to do. Plus it's a lot of fun!

