

# Empowering Kids through Project Skills

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## Abstract

*"No Problem was ever solved at the same level of consciousness that created it." - Albert Einstein*

Our world's future is in the hands of our next generation. They face enormous problems that can only be solved through effective, global, human collaboration and innovation. Problems such as global warming, war, natural disasters, disease, poverty, famine are not isolated to any one country or region. They are not caused by any one country or region. And they cannot be solved by those who created these problems, as quoted by Albert Einstein above, unless there is a change of consciousness, followed by action now, instead of waiting for our youth to grow up and deal with it.

Project management practitioners and chapters are uniquely experienced to help mentor our next generation, to equip them with the skills and tools to effectively collaborate and achieve project success. Teachers and most parents do not have the experience or education on fundamental project management concepts and best practices. Yet many schools begin introducing projects as early as Kindergarten, and many now require a capstone project to graduate from middle and high school. High school drop-out rates soar in the United States, while China, India, Australia, Taiwan, and other countries race to implement project-based learning as a way to teach their next generation how to innovate and gain global advantage.

Competition for college starts early, and achieving project success in the classroom is a differentiator that can give a student the leading edge. Success, or failure, in completing projects has a significant impact on a child's self-esteem. However, most kids are not equipped with the tools or methods to do projects effectively. There is no curriculum for teaching these skills, and most parents do not have the training to help them.

Project-based learning is being implemented in schools worldwide, yet there is no defined method to help teachers and students do projects successfully. Businesses and communities grow through the works of successful projects. They are the foundation upon which societies develop. Small businesses in particular, which have a tremendous failure rate, are the engine to job growth and innovation. A society's future depends on how well it prepares their future leaders and project contributors. Rapid advances in technology have changed the skills needed in today's global, virtual workforce. However, education curriculum has not kept pace. Change is needed, which our PMI community is uniquely suited to facilitate.

While PMI Educational Foundation, and the Project Learning Partnership (including Oracle Educational Foundation, George Lucas Educational Foundation, Global SchoolNet, Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, and many other individual contributors) get a formal plan for implementing project learning as part of the standard K-12 curriculum in place, it is the intention of this abstract to provide immediate tools to practitioners to help our youngest project managers and team contributors learn the skills needed to solve the global problems they face immediately.

The following inclusions of methods, tools, and worksheets are extractions from PMP and author, Kim Liegel's *Make It Happen! Step-by-Step Project Success* materials. These have been developed as an off the shelf, inexpensive educational toolkit for project coaches (including project practitioners, parents, and teachers), and middle to high school age students. They are presented here for use by project coaches and students, with the author's granted permission to make copies for educational use, but not for resale or to be altered or redesigned to overcome copyright law. Additional information, as well as free downloadable tools, are available from [www.MakeItHappen.ws](http://www.MakeItHappen.ws).

## Top 10 Project Do's

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1. **Clarify your goal.** What specifically do you hope to achieve as a result of this project? Goals give us direction and guide us in making decisions as we work through the project. Use the **Project Goal Planning** worksheet to define this up front. The **Project Planning Pyramid** (Exhibit 1) shows this as the pinnacle of the project plan.
2. **Identify the deliverables and requirements before you start doing the work.** This is a common mistake. Most people don't feel like they've really started until they get their hands on the tasks. The problem is, without defining these upfront it's hard to know if you're doing the right work. Use the **Project Planning** worksheet to define the deliverables, requirements, tasks, and estimates.
3. **Set a realistic schedule.** Be sure to consider other activities and commitments you already have before lumping more onto your plate. The **Project Planning** worksheet and a basic calendaring system can be used for achieving this.
4. **Consider potential problems and avoid them before they occur.** Use the **Project Team Charter** and **Project Plan Reality Check** worksheets, before problems have a chance to happen.
5. **Monitor progress at regular intervals.** This way you can verify progress and make adjustments to stay on track for achieving your goal. An easy way to do this is through a **Project Health Check**.
6. **Evaluate change before "just doing it".** Change is inevitable, and should be carefully considered beforehand. Use a **Change Evaluation Worksheet** to help you decide whether you should make it.
7. **Face setbacks with courage and resolve.** Don't be discouraged if things don't work out the way you planned. Sometimes the hardest part about doing a project is sticking with them through difficult challenges. Yet, sometimes the best part about doing a project is overcoming these very challenges! Review and revise your Project Plan as necessary.
8. **Verify results before considering the project done.** This is an important final touch, and should be part of the plan. Be sure to allow time at the end, but before the deadline, to make any last minute adjustments.
9. **Learn from your experience.** Projects are an incredible learning opportunity. Be sure to do a "lessons learned" review before you miss out on the valuable nuggets of wisdom that will help you further develop your project skills. What went well? What didn't? What would you do differently next time? Use the **Lessons Learned** worksheet with the project team to avoid making the same mistakes in the future, and doing what worked well again and again.
10. **Celebrate a job well done!** No matter how your project turns out, good, bad, or otherwise, always take time to celebrate your accomplishment for having made a plan and sticking to it.



Exhibit 1 - Project Planning Pyramid, Kim Liegel, Copyright 2007, all rights reserved.

## Project Goal Planning Worksheet

Setting a clear goal is the first step to every project, and pinnacle to its success. Complete the form below to develop the goal statement for your project.

<b>Project Name</b>		
<b>Start Date</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Total # Days for Project</b>
<b>Project Purpose or Expected Outcome</b> Answers the question, "As a result of this project, I expect to..."		
<b>Use this space to sketch, list, or describe the end results of the project.</b>		
<b>What assumptions or conditions are you expecting to hold true?</b>		
<b>What limitations or constraints will you face in achieving this goal?</b>		

# Project Planning Worksheet

**MakeItHappen!**  
Simple To Use Project Planning



**PROJECT PLANNING**

<b>PROJECT</b> _____ <b>GOAL STATEMENT</b> _____ _____	<b>PROJECT TEAM</b> Name _____ Contact Information _____ _____ _____
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<b>DELIVERABLE</b> _____ <b>REQUIREMENTS</b> _____ _____ _____ <b>TASKS</b> _____ <b>TIME?</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Total Time <input style="width: 50px;" type="text"/>	<b>DELIVERABLE</b> _____ <b>REQUIREMENTS</b> _____ _____ _____ <b>TASKS</b> _____ <b>TIME?</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Total Time <input style="width: 50px;" type="text"/>	<b>DELIVERABLE</b> _____ <b>REQUIREMENTS</b> _____ _____ _____ <b>TASKS</b> _____ <b>TIME?</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Total Time <input style="width: 50px;" type="text"/>
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START DATE: _____	TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: _____	HOURS PER DAY TO COMPLETE: Total Estimated Time ÷ Days = Hours per day
END DATE: _____	TOTAL DAYS AVAILABLE: _____	_____ ÷ _____ = _____

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WEEK 1	M	TU	W	TH	F	S/S
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						

ISSUES	STATUS	PRIORITY

PERSON	TASK				

## Project Team Charter

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Projects don't happen. People make it happen. Successful projects require effective team work. People need to know who's responsible for what, and how they are going to work together to achieve successful results.

Describe the plan for team meetings: Will there be a regular meeting?

Describe how the team will communicate status: Will there be some progress check-point for deliverables / milestones?

Describe how the team will communicate and escalate issues, and potential changes and problems.

Team Member Name	Role & Deliverables	Contact Info Email, Phone, IM	Availability

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## Project Reality Check Worksheet

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The last step to project planning is doing a reality check. This is one last look at the plan to make sure it's complete *and* realistic for achieving your goal.

Complete the form below before implementing your project plan.

- Do I feel confident in my overall plan, and do the pieces fit together to support the goal?
- Do I have all the requirements clearly stated and understood?
- Is my task list complete and in the order it needs to be done?
- Is my estimate realistic and can I get the project done on time?
- Do I need help learning how to do any of the tasks?
- Have I scheduled the tasks so I can work at a comfortable pace without too many things lumped together?
- Is my schedule up-to-date with my planned activities?
- Have I added wiggle room between tasks in case I need to adjust the schedule later?
- Do I know what materials and tools I need?
- Can I get the materials and tools by the time I need them?
- Have I talked with people I need help from to know when they are available?
- Do I need money for my project? If so, do I have it or know where it will come from?

## Project Health Check Worksheet

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An important part of doing projects is monitoring progress. This is accomplished through regular project health checks. These should be done at least once a week to make sure your project is on track and heading towards success.

Complete the form below each week as you are doing your project.

**Date:**

### Step 1 - Progress Checklist

- Update schedule with new or changed activities and tasks.
- Check off completed tasks on planning worksheet.
- Review previous week's Project Health Check for any unresolved issues.

### Step 2 – Project Health Check Questions

1. Will the project finish on time? If not, figure out how to get back on schedule.
2. Are there any big problems or issues you're stuck on? If so, how will you resolve them?
3. Are there any changes that you need to consider making? If yes, evaluate the change and decide what to do.
4. Are you on track to achieve your goal? If not, figure out why and how to proceed.

## Evaluating Change Worksheet

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Use this worksheet to help determine whether you should make a change to your project.

**Date of Proposed Change:**

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1. What is the purpose and expected outcome for the change? Describe the proposed change.
2. What overall impact will this change have on the project?

Potential Impact Area	Describe how the change will impact each area.
Goal	
Deliverables	
Requirements	
Tasks	
Estimate & Schedule	

3. Will it take more time or money to make the change? If so, how much?
4. If I make this change, will I still be able to achieve the project goal? Yes / No
5. Should I make the change? Yes / No

## Project Lessons Learned Worksheet

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At the end of every project, it's important to do a "lesson's learned" review. This is how to continually learn from past experience in order to benefit from it in the future.

Complete the form below, after you have completed your project.

<b>Project Name:</b>	
<b>Date Due:</b>	<b>Date Finished:</b>

Answer the following questions based on your experience completing the project.

What went well that you'd like to repeat on future projects?

What didn't go well that you'd like to avoid doing on future projects?

Did you achieve your goal? If not, why?

How well did your plan support achieving your goal?

Did the deliverables turn out like you expected? If not, why?

Were all the requirements met? If not, why?

Were all the tasks completed? If not, why?

Were the estimates close to the actual time it took to do the work? If not, why?

Did the schedule work out? If not, why?

What problems happened during the project? Were they preventable?

Did progress go as planned? If not, why?

Did you make any changes during the project? If so, how did they turn out?