



## How to Begin a Career in Project Management?

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*(Published in CAREERS UNLIMITED FOR LEARNERS 2013)*

As you approach that important time in your life when you are beginning to consider your career options for the future, you may be overwhelmed by all the job names that are out there. In the past few years, particularly since the country started focussing its energy on the infrastructure required for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, you may have heard the term 'project manager' come up a lot.

But what is a project manager and how do you become one? A project manager is someone who uses their knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to complete a project. A project, in turn, is considered an overall product / item / event / system that must be developed in order to deliver a specified benefit. If this makes it sound like anything could be called a project, it's a little more complicated than that. What makes a project different from a business function, for example, is that projects typically have a temporary lifespan, thus a clear start and finish and the project is not repeated in an on-going cycle, i.e. each project is unique.

So with that understanding, let's look more closely at what it takes to be a project manager: knowledge, skills, tools and techniques. Knowledge mostly comes from book and experiential learning as part of a training course or qualification and on-the-job training. Skills are developed over time and honed and refined throughout the course of your career. Project managers need both practical and leadership skills. During the course of their work, project managers will adopt tools and techniques that are considered good practices for both the discipline of project management and specific to the requirements of the environment they work in. Being a project manager means not only mean being able to apply good practices to the job but also understanding the many elements in the environment in which the project is being delivered. This is why many employers believe that one can only become a project manager after working in and understanding an industry or environment. As a result, most people who carry the title of project manager nowadays started their career in a related discipline, like engineering, IT programming, business analysis etc. and were increasingly tasked with managing projects related to those disciplines. There are few graduate qualifications specifically in project management for this very reason. Most universities and colleges offer project management qualifications at the post-graduate level, although it may be part of a course in a chosen field of study.

So, you see, there is no clear-cut path from school to being a project manager. So many industries are becoming 'projectised' (a fancy word for using project management and careful selection of projects to achieve their business objectives) that one could practice as a project manager in just about any sector.

If you would really like to be a project manager one day, your options are three-fold.

1) You could gain a qualification or experience in an industry or function that appeals to you and then seek to develop into a project manager using all the resources available to prospective project managers. These include short and post-graduate courses, certifications, literature, interest groups and networks of people in a similar position.

2) You could look for work in an industry that interests you and become involved in a junior role on projects and work your way through the ranks while finding ways to enhance your knowledge (for example through short courses / learnerships).

3) You could study a non-degree course in project management and then seek work in an environment that does not require technical knowledge and will enable you to practice project management in a generic manner.



Project Management falls under the Services Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) and they have a programme that facilitates learnerships in organisations, in line with option 2 above.

Project Management is an exciting, maturing discipline and right now our country has a great need for those with proven knowledge and skills.