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Compliance needs project management too

by Dhara Satija, Caitlin Holleran, and Kaitlin McCarthy

Whether you are reviewing your annual work plan, identifying personal development goals, or assessing the capabilities of your team, consider including an objective for strengthening project management skills. Complementary to technical compliance skills and knowledge, project management is the practical "how" to get things done and can prove equally important. Intentional or not, compliance professionals are often de facto project managers in the work we do for our organizations. While there is no defined "right way" to manage a project, your compliance program and team will improve the likelihood of meeting objectives on time and within budget by understanding the core project management concepts and tools.

Project management comes in all shapes and sizes

As compliance professionals, we are often in the project manager role without a formal title. Managing internal business and compliance stakeholders, planning and executing compliance project objectives, and managing timely responses to government inquiries are all examples of activities requiring organization, communication, detailed planning, efficient execution, and stakeholder management.

What is project management, and why is it important?

Project management is the strategy of breaking down activities, small and large, simple and complex, short and long, into more digestible segments with the end goal of completing the activities within a project's scope, which is the project's defined parameters, desired outcomes, and timeline. Project management should be tailored to the scale and complexity of the project.

Project management requires critical attention to scope, resources, budget, and timeline. It is the engine that moves objectives and organizations forward. Project management will:

- Provide project team stakeholders with clearly defined objectives, goals, roles, and responsibilities.

- Increase stakeholder engagement and support by facilitating communication and logging issues, risks, and actionable items.

- Drive timely results through efficiency and achieving desired project outcomes within the project budget.

Illustrative project management cycle

Project management's lifecycle consists of initiating, planning, executing, and assessing until completion and close-out. Table 1 includes key activities associated with each phase.

Table 1

Phase	Activities
Develop project goals and objectives	• **Project goals and objectives** should be defined upfront and used to inform project decisions • Frequently, project goals and objectives are documented in a formal **project charter**
Develop project plan and establish timeline	• **Project plans** help to break down complex tasks into more manageable activities • Estimate how long each activity will take, the level of effort, and interdependencies to estimate the **overall project timeline**
Define project team and resources	• Project team members should be identified with the correct subject matter expertise to support specific project activities • Stakeholders may consist of a **core project team and extended stakeholders**
Align on roles and responsibilities	• Clearly define roles and responsibilities increase accountability of the team • Tools such as **RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) matrix and project plans, with assigned tasks,** are frequently used
Project kick-off and determine communication cadence	• Projects are officially launched (kick-off) with **communications to align project teams** on the project objectives and project plan • Projects will define **communication plan**, based on project complexity and need
Project execution and progress tracking	• Project teams begin working through the activities in the project plan • **Project status is assessed** against plan, with assessments and updates occurring regularly, at least weekly • Proactive **risk and issue monitoring** occurs
Project close-out	• Complete **project objectives and outputs** • Archive project materials • Host **project debrief**, including successes and losses, and discuss lessons learned

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