



Some Fundamentals of Project Management

At its most basic, managing expectations is about proactive, clear, and explicit communication. Managing expectations is also about showing respect for one’s partners in the collaborative translation process.

My professional experience as a project manager includes positions at three translation firms of varying organizational maturity. In those positions, not only have I managed projects of varying complexity in over 60 languages, I’ve also had the opportunity to model my own work as a project manager off of the strategies of some amazing professionals. I would like to share a few of the fundamental skills and practices I’ve seen implemented consistently by the successful project managers with whom I’ve had the pleasure to work.

KNOWING YOUR PARTNERS

While collaborating with colleagues from around the globe is one very exciting and rewarding component of the job, the need to know as much as possible about one’s partners is compounded by a work environment in which collaboration takes place almost exclusively online. For example, if you discover that the translator in Japan is unable to work with the file you sent, you’ll likely lose an entire working day (due to time zone differences) coordinating to get them the correct file format. In an industry in which turnarounds of yesterday can be the norm,

proactively establishing project parameters around knowledge of a translator’s programs, capacity, location, etc., is one way to ensure smooth project launches.

Overall, the information that seasoned project managers endeavor to know about their translators includes:

- Location (time zone) and contact details (i.e., landline, cell, Skype, Whatsapp, or other messenger IDs—the more the better)
- Operating systems and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools
- Specializations, degrees, and certifications
- Other commitments and capacity
- General knowledge of the translator’s strengths and weaknesses

In addition to knowing this information about each of the translators with whom they work, as they become more experienced, project managers also become increasingly aware of factors affecting the language pairs with which they regularly work as a whole. Such factors include things like periods in which availability in certain language pairs will be greatly diminished due to vacation trends and national holidays, the cost of living in target markets and its effect on language costs, and degree equivalencies between target and source markets. Building this kind of working knowledge on individuals and cultures is an ongoing process. This is why project managers develop and rely on a network of colleagues and a repository of resources to which they can turn for all sorts of on-the-fly answers to language questions.

Since project management is largely about big-picture facilitation, project managers rely on these individuals at each stage of the translation process for micro-level feedback on performance, processes, and potential improvements. For example, as a project manager, I look to translators for proactive feedback on localization issues and problems that have popped up during file preparation, such as character or symbol corruption and other issues. I rely on internal desktop publishing specialists for information on compatibility issues between desktop publishing file formats and CAT tools. I turn to the subject matter experts in quality control with questions regarding

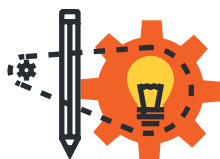
the appropriate stylistic treatment of textual features, along with feedback on the translator's performance, conformance to style guidelines, and how instructions could be improved. Maintaining open and constructive dialogue with all participants helps to ensure that any issues that arise are caught and resolved as quickly and smoothly as possible. Additionally, this ongoing positive collaboration amongst all stakeholders to overcome small challenges can have a big impact on overall work satisfaction and the realization of greater overall efficiencies as a result.



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

As I've learned the hard way, a deadline of "tomorrow" may mean September 1 to me, but on the other side of the globe (in China, for example), by the time a translator reads my e-mail message, that same "tomorrow" deadline will mean September 2 to her due to time zone differences. At its most basic, managing expectations is about proactive, clear, and explicit communication. Asking to receive a translation by tomorrow—Thursday, September 1 at 9:00 a.m. central standard time—communicates my delivery expectations much more explicitly than "tomorrow" does. This communication style helps to ensure timely deliveries and facilitates project timeline planning as well.

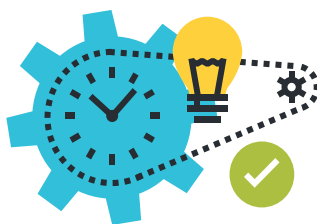
Managing expectations is also about showing respect for one's partners in the collaborative translation process. If a translator e-mails me proactively to let me know that they will need some additional time to complete a project due to unforeseen issues, I manage the expectations of the other providers in that process by letting them know of changes to the timelines so that they can adjust their schedules accordingly. The same goes for scheduling any unexpected



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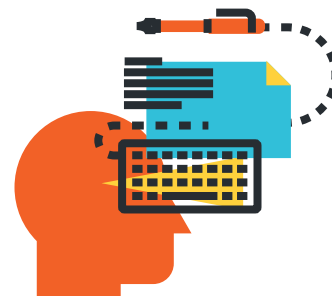
project reviews. If file updates or revisions are necessary, for example, I can alert the translator and request that they maintain a window of availability to respond to any questions or review changes to files. Proactively communicating changing project parameters with all providers within a dynamic environment in which multiple projects are being completed simultaneously helps to ensure that resources are available as adjustments are made. Most importantly, this keeps projects on track for final delivery.

The concept of managing expectations is also very important to establishing a project's scope with the client. For example, the client may send over three files for translation, but their request e-mail only references two. Better to ask up front whether they have accidentally attached an extra file than to find out upon delivery that content has been translated that the client neither wanted or needed. Conversations with the client surrounding project expectations may include more delicate topics as well. These could include how rush turnarounds increase project costs and decrease quality, or how failure to make appropriate project investments up front is more likely to result in situations that require expensive and inefficient rework—in which all losses will likely not be recoverable. Approaching these kinds of topics certainly requires delicacy, and sales representatives rely on their translation



teams to provide informative and realistic feedback to clients on project parameters.

While difficult, this sort of consultative approach has long-term benefits, not only for specific clients, but for the profession as a whole. As clients become more aware of the intricacies of the translation process, they are more likely to approach that process more critically, with an understanding of the investments necessary to reach translation goals. As a result, they're more likely to return with their translation needs to those providers who have a positive track record for managing expectations successfully.



PRIORITIZING

Project managers follow multiple projects simultaneously of various types and with varied processes. On any given day, a project manager's task list may include project launches, queries for the translator from the quality assurance team, quotes, questions from clients on new languages or services, questions from management on new translation technology, and post-production terminology management updates. More experienced project managers have established systems for tracking outstanding tasks. They prioritize tasks based on the overall objective of project management—to keep projects moving through the production process.

When I arrive at the office, I may have three high priority tasks that all need immediate attention. My general strategy will be to cross those items off my task list that I can complete most quickly, so that I can concentrate on more time-consuming items. For example, not only does passing a translation delivery to the quality team take just a few minutes, but by making this pass right away, I've ensured that the project has not stalled between the

translation and quality assurance stages. I may also be working on finalizing a multi-language quote and initiating a new quote. While CAT analysis runs on the new quote, I can follow up with any translators from whom I have not yet received a quote for my multi-language project. I'll keep bouncing between the two projects until I'm able to deliver the multi-language quote to the sales team and send the processed files to the translator for the new project quote. This sort of multi-tasking means that process-orientation is an important skill for project management. While project managers often focus on monitoring the overall big-picture status of projects, they must also be able to break down each stage into the individual actions that will move—sometimes inch—projects forward and follow through with those actions.



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Prioritizing, however, is also about understanding at what points in the process to make time investments. A good rule of thumb is that front-end investments often yield the greatest efficiencies on back-end processes. For example, when launching a project, establishing clear instructions on the treatment of stylistic features (acronyms, proper nouns, measurements, etc.) will be beneficial at every stage of the project that follows. This means that during the translation process, the translator

won't have to pause to make a treatment decision for each new stylistic feature they encounter. During quality review, the reviewer will have a translation product in which measurements and acronyms are treated consistently, so they will be able to review the content more quickly and request less changes. During the desktop publishing phase, fewer changes will be required, cutting down on project revisions during formatting. During post-production translation memory updates, fewer changes will need to be implemented into the bilingual file, cutting down on the time for that as well. By taking the time on the front end of the process to establish stylistic guidelines, the project manager has generated time savings at every subsequent stage.



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Still, project managers are also realistic, and they understand that no matter how carefully a project has been planned, surprises are bound to pop up as new versions of programs become available and generate new bugs, as deadlines are inadvertently missed, and revisions to the source file are sent over mid-project. Ultimately, project managers are flexible, and when problems arise their immediate reaction is to establish plan(s) B, C, and potentially D. Only after a project is back on track will they take the time to reflect on what went awry and what improvements can be made next time around to avoid similar issues.



IT'S ALL ABOUT STRATEGY

Overall, implementing the strategies outlined here can help project managers achieve a positive domino effect within their organizations, in which happy translators lead to happy reviewers and desktop publishers. This leads to happy clients as project costs decrease, happy sales teams as clients request more work, and happy managers and business owners as a result. Beyond these skills, and as with any professional, a healthy amount of curiosity also goes a long way, as does identifying the individuals within your organization who work hard and have the know-how and sticking with them!



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