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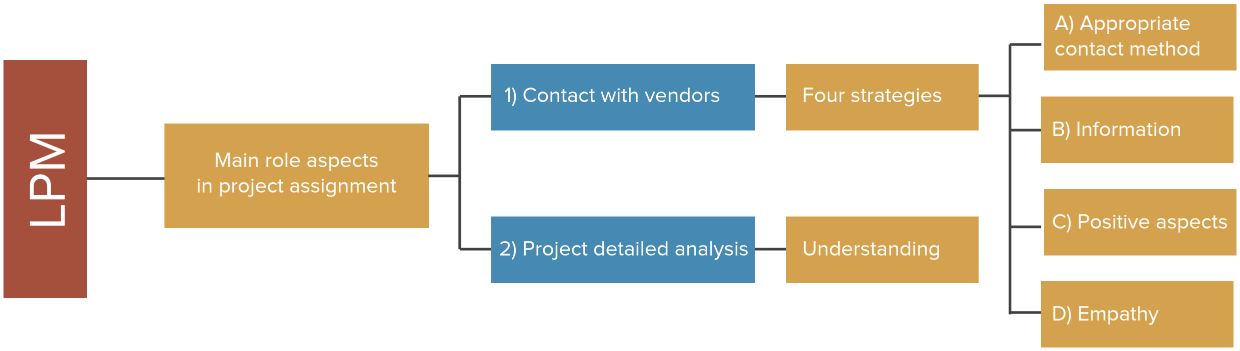
ATA TCD News

LPM: An Insider's Look at Localization Project Management



We all know that the role of a localization project manager (LPM) can be stressful. An LPM performs under tight deadlines, budget constraints, various work teams, and specific client requirements. Nevertheless, their position can be very satisfying. You learn new things all the time; you build relationships with vendors; you foster loyalty among both clients and linguists; you share the daily aspects of life with colleagues, you have opportunities to tackle professional challenges, and so much more.

Of all the lessons I've learned during my experience as an LPM (and I'm still learning), there are two major best practices that have had a positive impact on my day-to-day work. First, I learned the importance of establishing effective communication with the linguistic vendors that we contact. Second, I learned the value of analyzing the project and workflow in detail. In this post, I will describe some strategies that I believe are worth bearing in mind every day. These are not magic formulas, because a strategy that works for one LPM may not be helpful to another. After all, the job, by its very nature, tests us with unforeseeable challenges we have to tackle quickly and often cannot be met with the knowledge we already possess. Instead, I will focus specifically on effective project assignment.

1. Contact with Vendors

An LPM manages projects related to translation and works with vendors (including linguists, translators, editors, localizers, voice-over artists, and graphic designers) who accept a job at an agreed rate. When tackling a complex project, it's important that we bear in mind that there is always a vendor searching for what we offer. Our responsibility as LPMs is to find that interested vendor.

Based on my experience, there are four strategies I found most successful in helping with that search.

A) Choose the right contact method. After building a relationship, vendors come to understand and know what we need. But there are other times--either because of unfamiliarity with the linguist or the complexity of the project--in which there are more appropriate methods for communicating our needs. When the project that we have to offer is complex (e.g., has a lot of specific instructions, is unique among our daily projects, etc.), I find that sending an email is the most effective contact method because we can view everything together in a single thread. We can include all of the information in the body of the email and attach any relevant documents. It also allows us to organize our text in a more orderly way compared to instant messaging. I admit that I have approached new vendors with complex projects using other methods of communication and found it to not be as effective. The more orderly our request looks, the more interesting it will appear to the vendor. What translator would want to tackle a complex project that promises to be a hassle?

Another case is a rush project on which you need a vendor to start working right away so you can deliver the project within a tight deadline. In this case, I think instant messaging is the best form of communication. If the translator responds right away, we can explain what we need and ask if they can assist. If that person cannot do the job, we can continue looking and not waste any valuable time waiting for emails, since this method does not allow us to check if our message has been read, if the recipient will answer, or if they are online.

B) Include all the relevant information. It is imperative to include all important pieces of information. There are times when key details might be omitted from a message containing a project proposal. I suggest making a checklist that includes the following:

- The type of service is being requested: translation, editing, QA, voice over, etc.
- Language pair
- Delivery date and time
- Tool(s) to be used. This point is key. If unclear, the vendor may not be able to work using the required tool and might use a different one. This would require us to reassign the project.
- The size/scope of the project. I always specify the total number of words, pages, hours, and documents so that the vendor can evaluate whether they will be able to handle the project. In addition to new word count, it is always important to provide the complete word count, including: new words, fuzzy matches, and repetitions. The vendor should analyze everything that they are expected to do, and thus evaluate if they can commit to the project and its established deadline.
- References. Any available reference material should be sent to the vendor. Vendors who want to see references are not trying to complicate the process. It is reasonable for a vendor to want to see what kind of project they will be working on. Providing an example can give vendors an insight as to whether the project is suitable for them or not. Sometimes, if the topic requires a lot of research, it can slow down a process that would otherwise take less time. This can also help us prevent reassignments if the vendor rejects the job after checking the reference material.

C) Highlight the positive aspects of the project. As an LPM, one recognizes that some projects are more attractive than others. Some have positive attributes that make us enthusiastic about assigning the project. For instance, the translation tool to be used is really practical, the topic is interesting, or the project is long and will be profitable for the translator. Part of effective communication and efficient project assignment is knowing which aspect of the project would interest a vendor and highlighting that in the proposal we send. If we predict that it is a good opportunity for the vendor, it does not hurt to mention that in our message.

D) Put yourself in the translator's shoes. Finally, we cannot forget that the vendor will not be indifferent to the disadvantages of a project. For example, a project can appear less attractive if the deadline is very tight, if the topic is very specific, or if the tool used for the job is not very accessible. I think it is important for LPMs to acknowledge the disadvantages of the project and understand if the vendor does not want to accept certain working conditions. As I said before, we will surely be able to find someone who will accept the project and does not mind the conditions. In fact, these factors may be in the translator's interest if, for example, they prefer to work nights or weekends.

2. Detailed Project Analysis

In general, LPMs manage many projects at the same time. Some of the tasks they perform include reading instructions, analyzing documents in a software application, contacting multiple vendors, answering questions about ongoing projects, and solving problems. For this reason, LPMs are often unable to analyze every project in detail. However, I believe it is essential to make time to go over a project multiple times if we come across complex instructions or if our risk alarm goes off. I always tell myself that a 300-word project does not require the same attention as a 30,000-word project. Having this in mind helps me manage my time and stress level if any problems arise with smaller projects. Of course, though, we have to manage every project to the best of our ability. Nevertheless, dealing with unforeseen problems in a small project is not the same as with a larger one. Anticipating potential problems and crafting solutions helps focus our attention on the projects that need it the most. For example, if I make an error assigning a 300-word document and have it translated into Portuguese instead of French, or if I assign the project using memoQ instead of Trados Studio as the client requested, either problem can be solved quickly. I can hire a trusted and available vendor to translate the document into the correct language and it would be ready in a few hours. Or I can use the TM from memoQ to pre-translate the file in Trados Studio, a process that could take five minutes at the most, even on a slow computer.

However, if the job is larger or more complex (e.g., if there are style guides and specific instructions), the problems that arise could take longer to solve and may even generate additional costs. These are the types of projects that require additional attention, and in some cases, daily monitoring.

Moreover, I think it is important to mention that if as LPMs we do not understand the requirements or the full scope of a project, it is very likely that the translator won't understand them either. They will depend on us when things are unclear. That is why part of the success in assigning lies in having perfectly understood the workflow. We need to know how to manage the necessary tools and programs in order to be the go-to person for the project, and above all, have control over it. While the idea of having control may sound a bit strange, I believe it is key and helps reduce the potential stresses of a job. Having control over a project gives us confidence and makes us feel secure about our abilities. In order to achieve that, we have to understand the project as fully as we can so that we can make wise decisions from start to finish. It is in failing to do this that we are often faced with problems that no LPM would want to deal with.

If you are a linguist or PM and you have a suggestion or comment,

I would love to hear them to continue learning and writing about this topic.

Please write to me at marisol.perez@terratranslations.com

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Help Define the Core Competences Necessary for the Professional Practice of Localization Management: Take the LM CC Questionnaire

The Core Competences of the Localization Manager is a research study being conducted at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey by Alaina Brandt and research assistants Cheng Qian, Vanessa Prolow, and Xiaofu (Rick) Dong.

ISO standards are exceedingly clear that industry regulation falls to LSPs. LSPs, in turn, assign industry regulation to localization managers, since localization managers are the ones to screen the providers with whom they contract for services.

Since localization managers are assigned such a great responsibility, it just makes sense for our industry to standardize the competences necessary for the role.

The broad objective of the LM CC research study is to identify the core competences that are shared across diverse roles in localization management with the long-term aim of contributing to international standards of best practice related to the professional practice of localization management.

To that aim, we are now beginning to survey of the industry on the core competences necessary for localization management. Help define industry regulation by taking our Core Competences of the Localization Manager questionnaire!