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Becoming a Localization Project Manager

By Angie Tapia

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for junior, senior, inexperienced, and experienced Localization Project Managers (LPMs) is soaring. This upward trend is nothing new. The 2017 Project Management Institute Report titled Management Job Growth and Talent Gap 2017-2027[i] estimated that by 2027 employers will need close to 88 million people working in project management roles. Given the demand, there is a pressing need for project manager (PM) training opportunities. Fortunately, there are several higher education institutions and programs that offer specialized training in Project Management. Particularly, some deeply understand and are geared toward our favorite industry: the language services.

But what makes a good LPM? Is it his or her knowledge of CAT tools? his or her mastery of different file formats? his or her ability to define the scope of a project and assign tasks efficiently? The ideal skill set, according to the PMI Talent Triangle[ii], is a combination of technical, leadership, and strategic and business management expertise.

Technical Skills
In her Localization Manager Core Competencies typology[iii], Alaina Brandt identifies the localization knowledge and skills necessary for the professional practice of localization management. This typology offers future project managers a clear overview of the technical skills they may need to develop or improve, while also serving as a checklist for seasoned project managers who want to expand their knowledge. Although the typology includes soft skills, it emphasizes the relevance of technical skills, such as Technology, Management, and Contextual ramifications.

Leadership Skills
Localization Project Managers in training can draw leadership inspiration from a teacher, a mentor or a first boss: someone who believed in them as an LPM and gave them a voice. Another place to connect with inspiring leaders and build leadership skills yourself is Women in Localization, a space for project managers and industry members to share their ideas and create a community.

Strategic and Business Management Skills
According to Renato Beninatto and Tucker Johnson in their article titled The General Theory of the Translation Company[iv], delving into how our work adds value and opens doors to new opportunities enhances the status of our profession.

The LPM Mindset

LPMs are at the core of the localization process. Our main goal is to meet the needs of our clients, whether they are internal or external. We sort out problems, expedite processes, and try to remember to eat lunch!

In our work, it's important to cultivate some fundamental skills that will help us to keep work running effectively. Over the years, I have developed and honed five skills that have been invaluable in dealing with difficult projects and daily hiccups. I like to call this combination of skills "The LPM Mindset," which includes time management, effective communication, problem solving, positive attitude, personal organization, and flexibility.

Time management: You should understand and be able to differentiate between what is important and what is urgent, as well as possible combinations of the two.

Effective communication: If you did not understand the message, do not forward it or pass it on. Good communication is essential in defining the scope of a project, so you don't want to gloss over any ambiguities.

Problem solving: You do not need to know how to solve everything, but you do need to know who to contact with questions.

Positive attitude: This does not mean that you need to be happy all the time. That would be unrealistic. Your feelings—whether you are unhappy, angry or anxious—are valid but should not keep you from communicating in an effective and assertive way that helps you achieve your goals.

Personal organization: Find what suits you best. You do not need to adapt to what is trendy. Pick one organizational method, even if it's just post-its or an Excel spreadsheet, and keep tweaking it to meet your needs. Make organization a central part of your work, keep refining your method, and trust your tools.

Flexibility: Our profession requires us to work with different tools, files, schedules, time zones, languages, and processes. But let's not forget that we can also innovate, create our own routines, and take on tasks that we were always curious about but never tried. The key here is to be open to constant change.

Why do I say this LPM mindset can be used in both our work and our daily lives? Because when life gets tough, we're better equipped to rise to the challenge when we are flexible and organized, and solve problems with a positive attitude, good communication, and a clear timeframe.

Being a LPM is not an easy task and it takes time to become an outstanding LPM. There is so much to explore and learn. And just when you think you know everything there is to know, new file types gain popularity with your clients, new tools are developed, and new processes are proposed. That's why this will always be a stimulating and thrilling field.

Bio: Angie Tapia studied translation and interpreting at Ricardo Palma University. She served as head of Language Services at the Lima 2019 Pan American and Parapan American Games. She teaches professional management, specialized software and interpersonal relationships courses within the Professional Translation and Interpreting program at the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences and is in her second year of the master's degree in Administration and Project Management at UPC. Angie serves as Business Development Manager at Terra Translations.
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[i] PMI (2017). Project Management Job Growth and Talent Gap 2017–2027.

[ii] PMI (2020). Project Management Institute. [online] Available here. [Retrieved on December 23, 2020].

[iii] Brandt, A. (2019). LMCC V.4. [online] Available here. [Retrieved on December 23, 2020].

[iv] Beninatto, R. and Johnson, T. (2017). T*he General Theory of the Translation Company*. Nimdzi.

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* Once you have asked to join the ATA TCD group, our leadership council will validate that you are an ATA-TCD member and grant you access to the group.

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