People

Project Management Professional (PMP) certification exam

8 tasks · PMI Examination Content Outline (July 2026)

People is about leading and working with the humans who make a project succeed: the team, the sponsor, customers and everyone the work affects. The exam almost never asks you to define a conflict mode or a stakeholder tool; it describes a tense meeting, a disengaged team member, a sponsor with shifting expectations or a team that has stopped sharing, and asks what the project manager should do first, next or best. Strong answers understand the situation before acting, deal directly with the people involved before escalating, and use the agreed artifacts (team charter, stakeholder register, engagement and communications plans). Expect the same task in predictive, agile and hybrid settings, where the leader plans and coordinates in one and serves and protects a self-organising team in the other.

You should be able to: Given a scenario of tension, disengagement or misaligned expectations, can you say what is really happening, which people you would talk to first, and which agreed artifact or technique you would use before considering escalation?

Every task: the key point, the two approaches and the trap

PEO.1 Build a shared picture of what the project is for, and keep it alive

A project vision is a short, outcome-focused statement of why the project exists and what will be different for its users when it is done; it is broader than scope and should still make sense if the solution changes.

Predictive: The vision is captured early in the project charter and business case, then reinforced at kickoff and checked at each phase gate against the approved objectives.

Agile: The product owner holds a product vision and roadmap that the whole team helped shape; each sprint goal and sprint review connects the increment back to that vision.

Trap: Choosing to escalate or to restate the vision more forcefully when people disagree on direction; the stronger answer first finds out why they understand it differently, then realigns them together.

PEO.2 Find the sources of conflict and settle them with an agreed approach

Common sources of project conflict are schedules and priorities, scarce resources, technical opinions, unclear roles, cost, administrative procedures and personalities; most are about the work, not the people, and some conflict is healthy when it sharpens decisions.

Predictive: The project manager often facilitates the resolution directly, using the responsibility assignment matrix, schedule and change control to settle disputes over roles, priorities and scope.

Agile: The team is expected to work through most conflicts itself using its working agreements; the agile lead coaches and facilitates, stepping in only when the team cannot resolve it or ground rules are broken.

Trap: Picking 'force' or 'escalate to the sponsor' as the first move in a non-urgent conflict; when time allows, meet the parties and solve the underlying problem together.

PEO.3 Lead the team: set expectations, give it room to decide, and speak for it

Set team-level expectations early in a team charter or working agreement: purpose, ways of working, decision rights, quality standards, communication norms and how success is measured; revisit it when the team changes.

Predictive: The project manager builds the team, assigns work through the resource plan and RACI, tracks performance and adjusts leadership style as the team develops.

Agile: The agile lead acts as a servant leader and coach: the team self-organises, pulls its own work and decides how to meet the sprint goal, while the lead removes impediments and protects its focus.

Trap: Assigning tasks to individual members or making the technical decision for an agile team; the better answer empowers the team to decide and helps it through the obstacle.

PEO.4 Identify, analyse and win the support of the people the project affects

Identify stakeholders early and keep looking: anyone who affects or is affected by the project, including end users, regulators, operations staff, communities and suppliers; use the charter, contracts, org charts, interviews and brainstorming, and record them in the stakeholder register.

Predictive: Stakeholders are identified and analysed during initiation, with a register and engagement plan baselined early and reviewed at milestones and phase gates.

Agile: Stakeholders engage continuously through sprint reviews, backlog refinement and frequent demos; the product owner represents many of them, and engagement is checked each iteration rather than mostly up front.

Trap: Treating stakeholder identification as a one-time activity at the start, or sending every stakeholder the same report; registers and plans are updated throughout, and communication is tailored.

PEO.5 Sort stakeholders, surface what each expects, and bring the expectations together

Categorise stakeholders so you can treat groups appropriately: by power and interest, by internal or external, by direction of influence (upward to executives, downward to the team, sideways to peers, outward to customers and regulators) or by how they will be affected.

Predictive: Expectations are captured in requirements documentation, the scope statement and the stakeholder register, and realigned through formal reviews and change control.

Agile: Expectations are aligned continuously as stakeholders see working increments; the product owner reconciles competing requests in the backlog, and the team coaches stakeholders on the cadence of delivery.

Trap: Assuming silence means agreement, or resolving different expectations by meeting each group separately and promising each what it wants; expectations are surfaced and aligned together, then documented.

PEO.6 Know what customers inside and outside the organisation expect, and keep results matched to it

Customers can be internal (another department, operations who will run the product) or external (clients, end users, the public); identify who they are and what each expects in outcomes, quality, timing, service and communication.

Predictive: Customer expectations are defined in requirements and acceptance criteria, validated through scope reviews and quality checks, and confirmed at formal acceptance.

Agile: Customers or their proxies see each increment at the review, and their feedback re-prioritises the backlog; satisfaction is checked continuously through releases and usage data.

Trap: Waiting for the final acceptance meeting to learn whether the customer is satisfied, or treating every customer request as in scope; monitor satisfaction throughout and route new scope through change control.

PEO.7 Capture what the project knows and make sure it passes on

Find the knowledge the project cannot do without: specialist skills held by one person, decisions and their reasons, vendor and system know-how, regulatory interpretations and what operations will need after handover; a single point of knowledge is a risk to log.

Predictive: Knowledge is captured in project documents, the lessons learned register and formal handover packages, with transfer to operations planned as part of closure.

Agile: Knowledge spreads through cross-functional work, pairing, retrospectives and a shared Definition of Done that includes documentation; the team avoids relying on one 'hero'.

Trap: Leaving knowledge capture until the closing lessons learned session, or assuming a documentation dump transfers expertise; capture knowledge throughout and use people-to-people methods for tacit knowledge.

PEO.8 Decide how the project communicates and reports, and keep feedback flowing

Set out how the project will communicate in a communications management plan: who needs what information, why, in what format, how often, through which channel, from whom, and how sensitive information is handled; tailor it to the stakeholder analysis.

Predictive: Communication follows a communications management plan with scheduled status reports, steering committee meetings and formal reporting against baselines.

Agile: Communication is frequent and largely face to face or real time: daily stand-ups, visible boards, burnups and sprint reviews, with lightweight reports derived from the team's own artifacts.

Trap: Sending more information to fix a communication problem, or using the same format for every audience; first find out what each stakeholder needs, then tailor the content, channel and frequency.

Key terms

Team charter: An agreement the team writes about its purpose, values, ground rules, decision making and ways of working.

Servant leadership: A style in which the leader serves the team by removing obstacles, coaching and enabling it to decide, rather than directing every task.

Tuckman's stages: A model of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning.

Collaborate (problem-solve): The conflict mode that works through the underlying issue with all parties to reach a lasting solution that meets their interests.

Stakeholder register: The record of stakeholders with their roles, interests, influence, expectations and classification, kept current throughout the project.

Power/interest grid: A two-axis chart that groups stakeholders by their authority and their concern about the project to suggest how closely to engage each.

Engagement assessment matrix: A table comparing each stakeholder's current and desired engagement level (unaware, resistant, neutral, supportive, leading) to plan actions.

RACI chart: A responsibility assignment matrix showing who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed for each deliverable or decision.

Tacit knowledge: Know-how, judgement and experience held in people's heads that is hard to write down and moves mainly through working together.

Communication channels: The number of possible two-way links in a group, n(n - 1) / 2 for n people.

Information radiator: A highly visible display (a board, a chart, a dashboard) that shows project status to anyone who passes or looks.

Psychological safety: A shared belief that team members can speak up, admit mistakes and disagree without fear of blame.

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