

The Elusive Perfect Project Manager: Strategic vs. Tactical Thinking

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Selecting the right project manager (PM) can feel like chasing a unicorn. You want someone who can see the big picture, anticipate roadblocks, inspire cross-functional teams, and ensure nothing falls through the cracks. But too often, companies struggle with this because they're asking one person to be both highly strategic and deeply tactical – two skill sets that don't always live comfortably in the same brain.

For a bit of clarification, it may not be a skill set but rather a behavioral set. Part of one's personality.

SO, WHAT'S THE REAL CHALLENGE?

Is the perfect project manager a strategist or a tactician? Can they be both? And how does this tie into the Entrepreneurial Operating System® (EOS®) concept of Delegate and Elevate®? Or what is the relationship between using a behavioral tool such as The Predictive Index® and the insights derived determining the best personality for the role?

THE STRATEGIC VS. TACTICAL DIVIDE

Strategic thinkers deal well when dealing with ambiguity. They're focused on long-term vision, big-picture priorities, and aligning work with organizational goals. Tactical thinkers, on the other hand, are doers. They love task lists, workflows, and checking boxes. They execute.

Neither approach is wrong. In fact, both are critical to business success. But when you try to hire or promote someone who must operate at both levels every day, you often get imbalance



or even a behavioral conflict.

A tactical PM may execute flawlessly but struggle to step back and see when the project needs to pivot. A strategic PM may understand vision but get bogged down when they're knee-deep in timelines and task dependencies.

THE COMMON MISSTEP

Many organizations hire a highly tactical project manager thinking they'll "grow into" more of a leadership/strategic role. But this often leads to frustration and possibly failure – for both the PM and the leadership team. Tactical project managers are wired to control the process. That makes it hard for them to delegate effectively.

They often feel the need to touch everything, approve everything, and be the single point of accountability. It's not a character flaw; it's how they're built. The challenge of the more tactical PM is they find it difficult to hold others accountable and let go of the details.

That's why even high-performing tactical PMs can hit a ceiling. They get overwhelmed. They can't scale. They become the bottleneck.

ENTER EOS®: DELEGATE AND ELEVATE®

In **EOS**, one of the most powerful tools for solving this dilemma is the concept of Delegate and Elevate®. The idea is simple but transformational: identify the tasks that drain your energy or fall outside your highest and best use, and delegate them to someone more well suited.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR INSTEAD OF "PERFECT"

Rather than searching for a mythical/unicorn hybrid PM, be clear about what your company really needs:

Do you need someone to build workflows, manage deliverables, and keep projects on task? That's tactical.

Do you need someone to work cross-functionally, anticipate future risks, and help prioritize initiatives across the organization? That's strategic.

It's okay – and often preferable – to separate these roles. It's not a sign of weakness, but of organizational clarity.

Please note and I will say this twice:

It is easier for the strategist to do the work of a tactician than it is for the tactician to think strategically.

BUILDING THE RIGHT STRUCTURE

If you're scaling and finding it hard to get one person to do both jobs well, split the responsibilities:

- » **Project Coordinator:** Handles the day-to-day, tactical execution.
- » **Project Manager or Program Lead:** Focuses on the strategy, stakeholder alignment, and higher-level planning.

FINAL THOUGHT

There's no such thing as the perfect project manager – but there is such a thing as the right person for the right seat. Using **EOS** tools like Delegate and Elevate® can help you stop forcing strategic expectations onto tactical minds (and vice versa).

Instead, design your team around complementary strengths. That's how projects get delivered – and how people grow.

Please note and I will say this twice. This, BTW, is the second time:

It is easier for the strategist to do the work of a tactician than it is for the tactician to think strategically. 



About the Author

Bill Wagner is a CEO, leadership advisor, and author of *The Entrepreneur Next Door* with more than 30 years of experience building and leading companies. As the founder of Accord Management Systems, he works with construction industry leaders to bring clarity to their vision, discipline to their operations, and alignment across their teams.

Combining practical leadership frameworks with applied behavioral science, Bill helps organizations place the right people in the right roles, strengthen accountability, and execute with consistency in complex environments. Guided by his philosophy to help first, Bill equips leaders with the tools and insight to make better decisions, build stronger teams, and achieve sustainable growth.

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