Technical project manager: the role, the skills and how to become one

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A technical project manager runs delivery for work that is mostly technical: platform migrations, infrastructure, integrations, security programmes. The role combines project management with enough engineering judgement to challenge an estimate, understand a dependency and explain a trade-off to people who are not engineers.

TL;DR The short version

- A technical project manager runs delivery for mostly technical work such as migrations, infrastructure and integrations.
- The role combines project management with enough engineering judgement to challenge estimates and explain trade-offs.
- People reach it from engineering by coordinating cross-team releases, or from project management by building technical depth.

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What the role involves

- Planning and tracking delivery across one or several teams.
- Finding and managing cross-team dependencies.
- Running risk, scope and change control.
- Translating between engineers and business stakeholders.
- Coordinating releases, cutovers and incident follow-ups.

How it differs from nearby roles

- **Project manager:** a technical project manager does the same core work, but the content is technical enough that domain knowledge is needed to plan it well.
- **Technical program manager:** usually spans several related projects towards one outcome. See program and portfolio leadership.
- **Engineering manager:** owns people and team results; a technical project manager owns delivery across teams without managing the people.
- **Tech lead:** owns technical decisions inside one team. See tech lead vs engineering manager vs architect.

Skills that matter

- Reading an architecture diagram and asking where it can fail.
- Understanding CI/CD, environments and release mechanics.
- Scheduling with dependencies: see the critical path method.
- Running a risk register and change control.
- Clear writing: status updates, decision records and charters.

Paths into the role

- From engineering: take on coordinating a cross-team release, then a migration.
- From project management: build technical depth in the domain you support, such as cloud, data or security.
- From QA, operations or support: you already understand delivery and failure; add planning and stakeholder work.

Credentials

Project management credentials test planning and delivery practice. A technical credential tests the engineering judgement the role also needs. Many technical project managers find value in both. See IICTP and PMI: two credentials for two different jobs and check where you stand with the eligibility planner.

> Related credential: Program Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. IICTP. TPBOK, Engineering Governance & Agile Delivery. iictp.org/standards/tpbok.
2. IICTP. Eligibility planner. iictp.org/check-your-experience.

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