

From Blueprint to Reality: Your Guide to a Career in Project Management in the Middle East

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If you have ever considered a role as a project manager working in the Middle East, then this article is just for you.

Project Managers stand as indispensable team members in construction and delivery projects, acting as the cornerstone in every development initiative they undertake.

Their pivotal role involves facilitating effective communication between clients and their teams, ensuring projects are not only completed within budget but also on time – a task that proves challenging yet undeniably rewarding.

The Middle Eastern Project Management Landscape

The Middle East is a region renowned for its ambitious and cutting-edge projects, from towering skyscrapers in Dubai to futuristic urban developments in Saudi Arabia. As a project manager here, you might find yourself working on a variety of projects, such as:

- Infrastructure Development: Roads, bridges, and airports.
- Real Estate: Luxurious residential complexes and commercial skyscrapers.

- Cultural Heritage: Renovation of historical sites and new museums.
- Energy: Oil, gas, and renewable energy projects.

The Mega Projects Shaping the Region

However, it is the growing list of the regions mega projects that we have all come to expect and marvel at when we think of Middle East developments. And which, are defining the Middle East's project management legacy.

Here we outline five of the most headline-worthy construction projects. A feat of modern engineering, technology and human ingenuity.

NEOM (Saudi Arabia)

NEOM is a \$500 billion mega-city project aimed at creating a futuristic hub that redefines urban living. Spanning over 10,000 square miles, it includes residential areas, research hubs, sports and entertainment venues, and tourist destinations. The first phase is expected to be completed by 2025, with ongoing development continuing into the 2030s. Despite rumors of project scale-backs and concerns surrounding the developments funding, the latest press releases state that the project will go ahead as planned. Project managers working on the NEOM project will play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability credentials of the project. This includes integrating renewable energy sources, overseeing green building certifications, and ensuring adherence to the highest safety and environmental standards. Effective project management will ensure that timelines are met without compromising on quality or safety.

The Red Sea Project (Saudi Arabia)

This visionary luxury tourism destination includes 50 hotels, over 1,000 residential properties, and a new international airport. The project aims to blend luxury with sustainability, preserving the natural beauty of the Red Sea coast.

Phase one was completed in 2023, with full completion expected by 2030. For the project teams involved, ensuring that the development respects the ecological sensitivity of the area is paramount. Project managers will be responsible for overseeing sustainable construction practices, implementing waste management systems, and ensuring that all development adheres to strict environmental regulations.

Dubai Creek Harbour (UAE)

A joint venture between Emaar Properties and Dubai Holding, this project aims to develop a waterfront community featuring the Dubai Creek Tower, set to surpass the Burj Khalifa in height.

The completion of the tower is expected by 2025, with ongoing development of surrounding areas. Project managers will oversee the integration of smart technologies to create a sustainable and efficient urban

environment. They will focus on both innovative construction methods and materials to enhance durability and efficiency. Setting the standard for future projects in the region.

Lusail City (Qatar)

Lusail City, which has been in the planning since 2006, hosted the final of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Including residential areas, commercial districts, marinas, and entertainment venues, it is aiming to accommodate over 200,000 residents, when completed. Despite still awaiting final completion it is already being hailed as a rival city to Doha, and has been announced as the 2030 Capital of Islamic Culture.

For project managers working on this culturally significant development ensuring that the city's infrastructure is capable of handling large-scale events while maintaining day-to-day operations is critical. The vast work force is broad mix of international teams, all working closely to ensure global standards of safety and sustainability are implemented throughout the city.

Al Maktoum International Airport (Dubai)

The Al Maktoum International Airport project, in Dubai is a large-scale, complex development. Set to become the world's largest airport, it will be five times the size of Dubai's current international airport. The project will demonstrate the latest innovations in engineering and project management. Due to be completed in 2030 and set to cost an astonishing \$35bn, it will contribute significantly to Dubai's vision of becoming a global aviation hub.

Whilst the plans for its commencement have only recently been announced, it is already causing a frenzy of activity and anticipation of the job creation for those in the infrastructure space. Designers, planners, architects, engineers, safety specialists as well as those within the project professions, are all in line for the opportunities that this new development will bring.

A Snapshot of a day in the Life of a Middle East Based PM

There is rarely a typical day for a project manager working in the Middle East, however early starts are the norm. And will often begin with a flurry of emails, briefings and updates from the team. Coordination meetings with multinational teams are common, reflecting the diverse workforce typical of the region. Communication is key, as project managers must liaise with clients, architects, engineers, and contractors to ensure everything is on track.

Afternoons might involve site visits. Walking through construction zones under the blazing sun, ensuring safety standards are met, and addressing any on-site issues are part and parcel of the job.

Challenges and Highlights of Middle East Project Roles

One of the most rewarding aspects of being a project manager in the Middle East is seeing tangible results. The pride attached to watching cities rise from the desert and knowing the role that you will have played in its creation, provides immense levels of satisfaction.

However, without question the role of project manager comes with its challenges:

- **Time Management:** Working to tight deadlines and managing time efficiently is critical. With the added pressure of the vast sums of money involved, much of this pressure will be directed at the project leads responsible for ensuring that everything runs to plan.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Navigating a multicultural workforce requires understanding and respect for different cultural norms and practices. And it is important to recognise that working cultures are still changing. As a project manager it is your job to ensure communication across this diverse range of stakeholders.
- **Extreme Weather:** The intense heat can be a challenge, especially during summer months. Temperatures impact not only how you project manage but the parameters of developments in terms of design, material and construction processes. Those working in the Middle East on these challenging developments will be among the most experienced and competent practitioners in the industry.
- **Regulatory Hurdles:** Each country has its own set of regulations and standards that must be meticulously followed. It takes time to fully understand how these operate and the overall impact on what is being delivered. As the project manager you are expected to be the repository of the projects knowledge, a hub for both insight and foresight that the project will be reliant on.

Working Conditions

Working hours in the Middle East are typically from Sunday to Thursday, with Friday and Saturday being the weekend. The workday usually starts around 8am and can go until 6pm, though this can vary depending on the project's demands.

Leadership and Management Styles

Leadership styles in the Middle East can range from traditional hierarchical approaches to more modern, collaborative methods. It's important to adapt and be flexible, as understanding and aligning with the management and sponsor's expectations can significantly influence project success.

Compensation

Salaries for project managers in the Middle East are generally competitive, reflecting the high demand for skilled professionals in this field. Depending on experience, project managers can expect to earn anywhere from \$70,000 to \$150,000 annually, with senior roles commanding even higher salaries.

Career Progression

Career progression in the region is promising. With the continuous influx of mega-projects, opportunities for advancement are abundant. Networking and continuous professional development are key to climbing the career ladder.

Workforce Composition

The workforce in the Middle East is incredibly diverse. You'll work alongside colleagues from all over the world, creating a vibrant and dynamic working environment. The region is making strides in gender equality, with increasing opportunities for women in engineering and construction roles, particularly aligned with initiatives like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Research the organizations with the best reputations for employee satisfaction. A great place to start is with the [Great Place To Work](#) organization, who regularly review and award the best organizations in the region.

Tips for Finding a Role

1. Networking: Attend industry events and conferences.
2. Professional Associations: Join organizations such as PMI (Project Management Institute) for networking opportunities.
3. Online Job Portals: Websites like Bayt and GulfTalent are excellent resources. Check out our own brand new PMG job board coming soon!
4. Company Websites: Apply directly on the careers pages of major firms like AtkinsRéalis, Bechtel, and Aramco.

Major Employers

Major employers in the region include AtkinsRéalis, who is known for their work in engineering and project management. Bechtel, a global leader in engineering and construction. Aramco, the world's largest oil company, offers numerous opportunities in energy projects. And NEOM, the afore mentioned mega-city project.

A career as a project manager in the Middle East is filled with both immense opportunities and high rewards. From managing high-profile projects to navigating a multicultural environment, the experience gained here is unparalleled. Whether you're drawn by the competitive salaries, the chance to work on iconic developments, or the opportunity to live in a region rich with history and culture, the Middle East offers a unique and fulfilling career path for project managers.



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