First, full disclosure: I’m a faculty member in the Master’s in Project Management program at Northeastern University and am an active member of the local and international chapters of the Project Management Institute. But I hold both a Project Management degree and an MBA, so I can offer some unbiased insight into what each program is like from first-hand experience. Here’s some advice:

1. Forget the stereotypes.

It’s important to lose the notion that if you want to be in the C-suite you need an MBA, and if you’re a type-A personality who pushes projects through, you need a Project Management degree. It’s not accurate; so don’t get pigeonholed by these outmoded ideas. Rest assured, either degree is excellent for preparing students for high-level managerial and executive roles.

2. One size doesn’t fit all.

What it comes down to is that different businesses call for different kinds of leadership skills. What’s needed varies industry by industry and, more importantly, company by company. It’s good to consider what kind of role you want to play in a particular business and go from there.


Generally, an MBA is designed to teach you about strategy at a top-level, and how to develop an understanding of how decision-making supports the overall strategy of an organization. Project Management allows you to understand how to execute within the environment in which these decisions are made. Project managers ask the question: How is work executed in a complex business environment?

Continues on next page
4 A macro and micro view.

MBA students drill down to learn the nuts and bolts of how a company makes decisions, how each area (business, accounting, marketing, finance, etc.) functions, and how they relate to one another. Project managers also study this, but from a slightly different perspective — through the lens of how to best drive work and execute projects across each of these functional areas.

5 All about the environment.

It’s tough to generalize, but if you know you’re going into an industry with traditional divisions and hierarchies (like banking or finance), an MBA may be more useful. If you’re looking at a career in an environment in which executing projects are what drive business, then a Project Management degree might give you an edge. But either one will teach you skills for success. The question to ask is, “Which is best suited for my own career path?”

Interested in learning more about Northeastern’s Master’s in Project Management? Visit the program website to view the curriculum and learn how to apply.