

Career Sheet: Senior EU Project Specialist



KAISA VEHMAS (Senior EU Project Specialist, VTT)

My name is Kaisa Vehmas. I received my M.Sc. in Graphic Arts Technology from the Helsinki University of Technology in 2003. Since 2002, I have worked at VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland Ltd in different roles and visited also at KCL during 2007-2009. I have worked in various roles, including Research Trainee, Researcher, and Senior Scientist. The focus of my research has also changed during these years from printing and media research and digital transformation to user centric studies dealing with user experience and customer understanding. In 2023, I started as Senior EU project Specialist, managing and supporting various EU-funded projects, ensuring their successful execution and alignment with organizational goals.



OVERVIEW OF THE JOB

As Senior EU Project Specialist, I manage and oversee various VTT coordinated, EU-funded projects, ensuring their successful execution and alignment with requirements of European Commission and organizational goals. I support the coordinators in planning, management, and implementation activities, as well as working with stakeholders, and preparing reports and other necessary documents.

The research field in the business area is related to Carbon neutral solutions, including Energy, Transport Technologies, and Built Environment. The Energy research area focuses on developing sustainable energy solutions, including nuclear energy and hydrogen technologies. The Transport Technologies area aims to innovate in mobility and transport systems. The Built Environment area is dedicated to creating sustainable and smart infrastructure.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU

My inspiration to follow this career path came from a deep interest in research and development. VTT works on a wide range of projects aimed at developing innovative solutions to address global challenges. In addition, VTT's approach to innovation involves close collaboration with industry, academia, and public sector partners. The opportunity to contribute to significant advancements and collaborate with international partners has always been a driving force for me.





TYPICAL WORKING DAY

A typical working day for a Senior EU Project Specialist involves coordinating and managing various EU-funded projects. At the moment I'm working with ten different projects and consortiums. I usually start my day by reviewing emails and responding to urgent queries from project partners and stakeholders. Throughout the day, I participate in meetings with my colleagues and external partners to discuss project progress, address any issues, and plan upcoming tasks. I also spend time preparing reports, updating project documentation, and ensuring compliance with EU regulations. Additionally, I develop the internal processes, tools and templates to ensure smooth implementation of various projects. Nowadays, I work both onsite in our office and remotely at home.



STUDY & CAREER PATH

I pursued my studies in Helsinki University of Technology in a field of Graphic Arts Technology as my major and Wood Processing Technology as my minor. In 2002, I secured a position at VTT for my Masters' thesis work. During that time, I had the opportunity to work on a multicultural project while completing my thesis. I graduated as M.Sc. (tech.) in 2003. Since then, I have worked in different projects, including EU funded projects, national projects and customer projects, in different roles such as coordinator, work package leader and research worker.

Although I have been with the same employer for a long time, I have had the opportunity to work on a variety of projects and teams and develop my skills. For example, I have completed the IPMA Level C certification that is an internationally recognized certification for experienced project managers. This certification demonstrates that the individual has the project management competencies and has consistently applied these competencies in a leading role.

If I could start all over again, I would still choose a career in research and project management, but I might explore different fields within the same domain to gain a broader perspective. I would also seek more international experiences earlier in my career to improve my language skills, enhance my understanding of global research and collaboration, and network with different people.



KEY SKILLS

The position as a Senior EU Project Specialist requires strong knowledge of EU projects, excellent communication skills, and the ability to work in a multicultural environment.

- **Project Management:** Project management skills are essential for coordinating and overseeing multiple projects simultaneously. I use this skill to ensure that all project activities are aligned, deadlines are met, and resources are efficiently utilized.





- **Administrative skills:** Administrative skills are crucial for managing projects. I use these skills to keep all project-related information organized and accessible. Additionally, I take care of various coordination tasks, supporting coordinators in their activities to ensure smooth project execution.
- **Communication:** Communication skills are crucial for effective collaboration with both internal and external team members and stakeholders. I use this skill to clearly convey project goals, updates, and feedback, ensuring everyone is on the same page.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration skills are vital for working effectively with diverse teams. In projects I'm working actively with researchers from different organizations. Collaboration is a key factor for successful projects.
- **Coaching:** Coaching is important for guiding and mentoring project coordinators and team members. I use this skill e.g. to help coordinators and research teams to develop their research ideas and achievements into concrete exploitable results.
- **Problem solving:** Problem solving is essential for addressing challenges and finding effective solutions for them. I use this skill to identify issues, analyze options, and implement the best course of action.
- **Adaptability:** Adaptability is necessary for adjusting to changing project requirements and environments. I use this skill to remain flexible and responsive to new challenges and opportunities in the projects I'm supporting in different research fields.
- **Flexibility:** Flexibility is important for managing multiple tasks and priorities. I use this skill to balance various responsibilities and adapt to shifting demands.
- **Motivation:** Motivation is key for maintaining enthusiasm and drive. I use this skill to stay focused on project objectives and inspire my team to achieve their best.
- **Personal responsibility:** Personal responsibility is crucial for taking ownership of tasks and outcomes. I use this skill to ensure that I meet my commitments and deliver high-quality work.
- **Time management:** Time management is essential for prioritizing tasks and meeting deadlines. I use this skill to allocate my time effectively and ensure that all project milestones are achieved on schedule.
- **Team spirit:** Important for fostering a positive and productive work environment. I use this skill to build trustable relationships with my colleagues and promote a sense of camaraderie and mutual support.



CAREER PROSPECT

With my skills and experience, I can work in various roles within the research and development sector, particularly in project management and coordination. My expertise in consumer and stakeholder understanding is highly beneficial across all industry sectors. Additionally, my project management skills are universally applicable and essential in every sector.





CHALLENGES

In my job as a Senior EU Project Specialist, I encounter various challenges. Balancing multiple projects simultaneously requires careful planning and prioritization to meet deadlines and utilize resources efficiently. Managing international collaborations involves navigating different cultures and time zones, which necessitates effective communication and coordination. Ensuring compliance with EU regulations is another critical aspect, as it involves preparing reports, updating project documentation, and aligning all activities with the European Commission's requirements. Additionally, addressing project issues as they arise requires thoughtful analysis and the implementation of effective solutions.



YOUR ADVICE TO STUDENTS

My advice to students is to pursue your interests passionately and seek opportunities for hands-on experience in your chosen field. Networking and continuous learning are also key to success. Engage in internships, volunteer work, and projects that allow you to apply your knowledge in real-world settings. Building a strong professional network and staying updated with industry trends will help you navigate your career path effectively. Additionally, developing a unique combination of skills that differentiate you from others can be highly valuable. This could include blending technical expertise with soft skills like communication and leadership. Remember, perseverance and a proactive approach are essential in achieving your career goals.



YOUR ADVICE TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Teachers and parents can really help their students and children by encouraging them to explore different career options and giving them the resources and guidance they need to follow their interests. Creating a positive and supportive environment can help students build confidence and resilience. Offering opportunities for students to get familiar with real work environments, like internships, job shadowing, and industry visits, can provide valuable insights and practical experience. Open communication and being actively involved in their educational journey can make a big difference in their motivation and success.



LEARN MORE

For more information about my career and the projects I work on, you can visit the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland's website.

