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## **Seven Project Management Pitfalls**

Working as a team is great, until it's not. Most companies encourage people to work together in teams with the goal of achieving better results through collaboration. However, it is not as simple as it sounds due to the complexity inherent in team collaboration. Every team is bound to have its own issues and concerns related to the completion and the timely delivery of its project(s).

Do you know what specific issues and concerns prevent your project team from succeeding?

### **Unrealistic Targets and Deadlines**

One of the biggest factors which give teams nightmares is expecting them to meet unrealistic targets and deadlines.

To begin, set your project up for success by consulting a calendar. A quick look at the calendar before kicking off a project will enable you to determine if it is a good time to start a project. If the end of a quarter is typically filled with reporting deadlines or specific deliverables, then starting a project at that time doesn't make sense.

Part of project success is setting the right expectations for stakeholders. After you have completed your project scope document and built your project plan, compare the project timeline with the deadline to determine if the dates are in alignment. If the timeline exceeds the project deadline, now is the time to add resources, cut scope or negotiate a new end date.

### **Unclear Objectives**

Objective and scope statements are the foundation upon which all projects are managed. Teams refer to these documents to help them understand a project's:

- Overall goals and objectives
- Responsible parties
- Requirements
- Deliverables
- Budget



When defining the scope of a project, consult with your project sponsor and each stakeholder to identify their needs and expectations. Doing so will enable you to:

- Expose missing requirements
- Provide a more realistic timeline
- Avoid scope creep
- Reduce the number of change orders

Once you've developed a proper scope statement, make sure it is reviewed and approved by your project sponsor and individual stakeholders. Keep in mind that the success of your project will be measured by the ability of your team to meet the requirements and deliverables as defined in the project scope statement.

### **A Poorly Conceived Project Plan**

A project without a plan is like taking a road trip without checking a map. Without a map, you are liable to take several wrong turns before arriving at your destination. However, having a project plan in and of itself is not enough. Take the time to think through all of the tasks that must be performed to satisfy your project requirements. A well-thought out project plan should not only list the tasks to be completed but answer questions such as:

- How long will it take to perform each task?
- What order should the tasks be performed?
- Are there tasks that can be performed in parallel?
- Do certain tasks require the completion of other tasks?
- Who should be assigned to the task and are they available?

You can't answer those questions in a vacuum. Creating a realistic project plan requires consulting with your team members and your project sponsor as well as any colleagues who have managed similar projects.



### **Scope Creep**

Scope creep is the scourge project management! Scope creep typically happens due to missing requirements or an insufficient change management process. Even in the best projects, scope may need to change when new information is received or conditions change.

To handle scope creep, first assess how the change will impact the project's scope, budget and timeline. If the project timeline cannot be expanded, will adding more resources or decreasing scope keep the project on track? Once the impact has been assessed, document the change and its impacts and then present the tradeoffs to your project sponsor and other stakeholders for their approval and sign off.

### **Inadequate Resources**

It's been shown time and again that overtime has a negative impact on the quality of project deliverables. Don't expect your team to make up for a lack of resources. When you're developing your project schedule, consider:

- Holidays and other time out of the office
- Concurrent project demands
- Meetings, time tracking and other responsibilities that will impact their availability to do project work

Remember that a forty-hour workweek does not equate to forty hours of project time.

### **Poor Communication**

At the centre of team collaboration is communication. It is important to keep the communication flowing at all times, as a lack of it can impact the quality of your deliverables and lead to missed dates.

Choose the right medium for your communicating with your team. For example, email is not the best method for discussing Issues that arise during the course of the project. Following a discussion thread in email is time consuming and not the most efficient way to resolve an issue. Email is best used for passing along important messages to the team.

Schedule regular check-ins with the team. The frequency of your meeting schedule will depend in part on the tools you are using to track your project tasks and the complexity of your project. If you utilize a project management tool that enables team members to update their status in



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real time, post questions and comments, and track their time, you can reduce the number and frequency of your meetings.

### **Lack of Accountability**

You and your team are responsible for the success or the failure of the projects you undertake. Accountability requires both transparency and communication. Team members are more likely to follow through on their commitments if their progress (or lack there of) is visible and they are responsible for reporting the status of their tasks. Meet regularly with the project team to review project status and deal with any roadblocks that are impacting the team's ability to complete their tasks.

### **Conclusion**

The measure of success of an individual project is not the absence of issues, but the ability to identify and resolve issues as early as possible. As a team leader understanding and avoiding common pitfalls in managing project teams will help you achieve greater success with delivering your projects in scope and on time.