Tips for Delivering Projects on Schedule

The larger and more complex a project is the greater the chance of that project being delivered over budget and behind schedule. However, small projects also face similar challenges of delivering successfully.

Project success often comes from building a team culture that reinforces the "team" being responsible for the project's success and ensuring that team members understand their responsibilities but at the same time avoid the "I did my part" mentality.

Building an effective project schedule that clearly defines resource responsibilities and deadlines is another major influencing factor to whether a project will be delivered successfully. To succeed, and deliver projects as planned, it's vitally important for project managers to build realistically achievable schedules. This is often accomplished by decomposing large pieces of project work into smaller more manageable components and then organizing those components into a schedule that delivers the most value to the client. However, this is an ideal approach. Often project managers are given project deadlines, future dates, from which they must work backwards to develop a project schedule that often results in forcing required work into limited budgets and timeframes. This type of environment is one that produces the greatest challenges for project managers attempting to deliver projects successfully. Some approaches that may be useful for projects and project teams to help alleviate some of the struggles in delivering projects on schedule include:

- Involving stakeholders in the planning, scheduling, and estimating of project work is vital to creating a schedule that is achievable. Include subject matter experts and whenever possible those individuals that will actually be performing the work.
- Performing an effective risk/issue analysis before beginning the project provides stakeholders with an understanding of how these items may impact project schedule and deliverables. This activity also provides the project manager with a baseline list of things they need to pay particular attention to as the project progresses.
- Managing the project risk/issue log throughout the life of the project allows the project team to react early to issues and mitigate risk before it impacts the project.
- Holding a project kick-off meeting with key stakeholders, sponsors, managers, and the project team. Use this to get all parties on the same page and to display stakeholder support for the project.
- Keeping the project team from falling into the rut of "that's the process so that's the way it is". Often creative solutions are required to solve unique problems. The project team should have flexibility, to a point, to get the work done.
- Questioning project processes that take up time but provide little value. Streamline project work and simplify process compliance by eliminating unnecessary project procedures as long as doing so doesn't cause any adverse effects.
- Using tools and templates for what they are intended to be…tools and templates. Content is often much more important than the tool or template used to present it. Avoid getting so caught up in building and/or using tools and templates that focus on project deliverables and deadlines is lost.
- Avoiding trying to do everything yourself. Where needed, solicit help from others and teams to help fill knowledge gaps within your team.
- Keeping focus on making progress. Avoid getting so caught up in daily project issues that focus on project deliverables and deadlines are lost.
- Doing whatever possible to increase the speed and effectiveness of communication between projects and project teams, especially when there are multiple groups involved.
- Communicating with project teams. The more complicated a project is the more important it is for project teams to communicate thus, the more often teams should meet to discuss status and

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issues. However, this doesn't mean that there should be meetings just for the sake of having meetings. In addition, the more often a project team meets the more likely it is that each meeting will require less time.

- Getting the project team into a room for multiple shorter meetings of 10-15 minutes multiple times a week may be more effective than one longer weekly meeting. Multiple meetings allow groups to communicate issues, needs, and requirements faster and for other groups to react more quickly when needed because information is not delayed until a weekly status meeting.

- Understanding how, and what, communication mechanisms are used by the project team. Is the communication urgent? Would email work best? Is a phone conversation more appropriate than e-mail? Is a face-to-face conversation required?

- Avoiding misinterpretation of text. Don't attempt to solve complex problems using email. More often than not this approach will result in a lengthy email chain with emails going back and forth between recipients, others getting CC'ed into the conversation, people responding who may not be familiar with the topic, others getting confused, etc. As a result, what a face-to-face conversation may have resolved in a few minutes may drag on for days using email.

- Using the phone if the job can get done through a two minute phone conversation as opposed to a lengthy email chain.

- Trusting your team to perform their responsibilities but verify that progress is being made and that the work being performed is indeed in line with project objectives.

- Encouraging project team members to pursue training opportunities to increase their subject

matter knowledge and to also broaden their understanding of how other project areas work and interact with each other. Expanding upon this knowledge allows project team members to better understand how their actions may impact project deliverables later in the project's life.

- Encouraging members of the project team to get to know each other. People are more inclined to help those that they have a relationship with than those they don't know.

- Preventing "Parkinson's Law" that states work will expand to fill the time available for its completion. One approach to avoiding this is to set intermediary deadlines. Set internal deadlines for project teams to deliver on commitments well ahead of when they are actually due.

- Assuming "Murphy's Law" that states whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. One approach to dealing with the inevitable unexpected event is to assume that if the project is on schedule that in reality, the project is behind schedule. Because something unexpected will almost always happen its important that project managers plan enough time for project teams to recover from unexpected events without adversely impacting the project schedule.

The content of this newsletter was paraphrased from a presentation by Krishen Kota, PMP during the October 2007 meeting of the CDC Project Management Community of Practice (PMCoP). For more information regarding delivering projects on schedule, Krishen's presentation, the CDC PMCoP, or the CDC Unified Process (UP) please visit the CDC UP website located at http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/. ▌

Upcoming Project Management Community of Practice Meetings and Topics

- **Friday, December 7**
  The Inadvertent Project Manager

- **2008 Scheduled Meetings**
  Friday, January 25
  Friday, February 29
  Friday, March 28
  Friday, April 25
  Friday, May 16
  Friday, June 27
  Friday, July 24
  Friday, August 22
  Friday, September 26
  Friday, October 24
  Friday, December 5

Contact the CDC Unified Process Team

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