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The Project Turnaround

Challenged projects are not a lot of fun to be in the vicinity of. In this deck we cover how projects, get into trouble, methods for turning them around, and how to get everyone back on your side.

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How to tell a project is in trouble

As a business leader, product owner, or project manager, there are several signs that can indicate your project is in trouble, challenged, or on the verge of failure. Some of these signs include:

1. **Project delays:** If the project is taking longer than anticipated to complete, it may be a sign that the project is facing challenges.

2. **Budget overruns:** If the project is exceeding its budget, it likely as sign that the project is facing financial trouble(s).

3. **Low team morale:** If team members are showing signs of low morale, such as decreased productivity, lack of enthusiasm, or high turnover rates, it may be a sign that the project is going in the wrong direction structurally or politically.

4. **Scope creep:** If the project scope is expanding beyond what was originally planned, it is likely a sign that the project is facing challenges in managing requirements.

5. **Lack of communication:** If there is a lack of communication between team members, stakeholders, or the project manager, it may be a sign that the project is hitting a communication brick wall.

6. **Quality issues:** If there are frequent defects or quality issues with the deliverables, it may be a sign that the project team is mismanaging quality standards or experiencing other implementation-related quality gaps.

7. **Stakeholder dissatisfaction:** If stakeholders, such as customers or investors, are expressing dissatisfaction with the project, it is likely a sign that the project is facing challenges.

8. **Lack of progress:** If the project is not making progress or achieving milestones, it may be a sign that the project is facing challenges in meeting its objectives.

If you observe any of these signs, it is likely time to reassess the project's status, the project team structure, and take action to address the challenges it is facing before it is too late.

Why do projects get into trouble *(page 1)*

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1. **Weak planning:** Sometimes projects are not planned properly, which can lead to unclear expectations, vague goals, and objectives, causing the project to go off track.
2. **Lack of resources:** It's essential to ensure that your project team has the necessary resources to complete the project on time and within budget. This includes staff, equipment, and materials.
3. **Unrealistic timelines:** Setting unrealistic timelines can put pressure on the team to complete tasks faster than is reasonable, leading to project delays, quality issues, and budget overruns.
4. **Scope creep:** Scope creep is when project requirements change, and the team starts adding more features and functions beyond the original plan, leading to increased costs and delays.
5. **Weak communication:** Communication is a major key to any successful project. Miscommunication and misunderstandings among team members and stakeholders can cause project delays, morale issues, and ultimately failed projects.
6. **Inadequate risk management:** Projects have risks, and it's important to identify and mitigate them early on to prevent delays and budget overruns. Failing to perform formal risk management activities is a top reasons for project failures.
7. **Lack of stakeholder communication:** Stakeholders must be involved in the project to understand its progress and importance, leading to their support and cooperation.
8. **Weak project governance:** A lack of clear project governance can lead to confusion over decision-making, authority, and responsibility, leading to delays and miscommunication.
9. **Weak project leadership:** A project manager must have leadership skills and experience to manage the team effectively, leading to better project performance.

Why do projects get into trouble *(continued)*

10. **Inadequate project controls:** Proper monitoring and measuring of project progress are critical to identify and address problems in a timely manner.
11. **Weak change management:** Proper approval and management of changes to the project scope, schedule, or budget are crucial to prevent delays and confusion.
12. **Inadequate quality control:** Proper quality controls must be in place to ensure the project meets its goals, preventing rework, delays, and added costs.
13. **Lack of training:** Providing team members with the necessary training to acquire the required skills and knowledge related to project work, and project management in general, can help prevent errors, delays, and rework.
14. **Insufficient testing:** Proper testing is crucial to identify defects, errors, and prevent delays.
15. **Inadequate vendor management:** Vendors must be managed effectively to ensure they deliver on time and within budget, preventing project delays.
16. **Political interference:** Political factors such as changing priorities can interfere with the project, leading to delays, confusion, and added costs.
17. **Cultural issues:** Cultural differences among team members or stakeholders can cause misunderstandings, lack of cooperation, and project delays.
18. **Technological issues:** Technological problems, such as equipment failures, compatibility issues, or system crashes, can cause delays and added costs.

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1. **Hold a project review meeting:** Gather all key stakeholders to review the current status of the project and discuss the issues that are causing the project to fail.

2. **Review the project scope and contract:** Identify any ambiguities or gaps that may be contributing to the disagreements. Often, this can be handled by mirco-analyzing the statement of work requirements.

3. **Develop a clearer project plan:** Evaluate and re-outline the project objectives, scope, timeline, budget, and other key parts of the project plan. Take it section by section and be honest with yourselves.

4. **Conduct a root cause analysis:** Identify and address the underlying causes of the specific project challenges that are occuring. This may include such things as scope creep, knowledge-gaps, dependency misunderstandings, inferior technology, and unresolved stakeholder disagreements.

5. **Negotiate changes to the project scope or contract(s):** Resolve disagreements between the customer, contractors, subcontractors, and other supporting vendor. Most stakeholders cannot afford to fail.

6. **Define a change control process:** Ensure that any future changes are properly reviewed, approved, and thoughtfully integrated. If you need to reset, make sure there is optimal structure around change management.

7. **Establish a project governance structure:** Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes.

8. **Develop a modified project schedule:** Create a new, or modify the existing project schedule. This includes identifying and updating all impacted tasks, milestones, and dependencies that will get the project back on track.

9. **Monitor project progress:** Once a new project plan and schedule or baselined, assertively report on any further deviations or delays against the schedule as soon as they occur (hopefully not, but they may).

10. **Ensure necessary resources and skills:** Ensure that project team members have the necessary skills and resources to complete their tasks. Training, mentoring, and adding specialists all have merit.

11. **Develop a communication plan:** Once a new plan and schedule or baselined, consistently keep all stakeholders informed about the project budget, progress, issues, and risks.

12. **Hold regular status meetings:** Ensure that everyone is on the same page by holding regular status meetings with the project team and stakeholders.

13. **Identify and mitigate project risks:** Develop a risk management plan and regularly review and update it.

14. **Implement a quality control process:** Ensure that all deliverables meet the required quality standards.

15. **Develop a dispute resolution process:** Address any disagreements or disputes that may arise in the remainder of the project. The process of mediation, provided by an agreeable leader, is optimal.

16. **Conduct a post-mortem analysis:** Identify lessons learned and ensure that similar issues do not arise in future projects by conducting a post-mortem analysis.

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Behind schedule and over budget projects (a specific set of challenges/resolutions)

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1. Perform a comprehensive project assessment: This involves reviewing the project plan, schedule, budget, and status reports to identify the root causes of delays and cost overruns.

2. Identify critical path activities: Critical path activities are those that have the greatest impact on the project timeline. By identifying these activities, you can focus your efforts on accelerating their completion.

3. Prioritize deliverables: Determine which project deliverables are most important and focus on completing those first. This will help ensure that critical project milestones are met.

4. Reallocate resources: Review the project team structure and their workload to determine if there are any resources that can be reassigned to help accelerate critical path activities.

5. Develop a recovery plan: Based on the project assessment and prioritization of deliverables, develop a recovery plan that outlines specific actions to be taken to get the project back on track.

6. Communicate with stakeholders: Keep all stakeholders, including the project sponsor, team members, and clients, informed about the status of the project and any changes to the project plan.

7. Manage risks: Identify and manage any new risks that may arise during the project recovery process.

8. Implement project management best practices: Review the project management processes being used and implement best practices to ensure the project stays on track.

9. Monitor progress: Track progress against the recovery plan and adjust the plan as necessary to ensure that the project is on track to meet its objectives.

Approaching stakeholders regarding a troubled project

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As a project manager or business leader responsible for a troubled project, it is critical to communicate effectively with the project stakeholders about the state of the project. It is essential to communicate the situation thoughtfully, empathetically, and in a politically healthy manner. Here are some suggested ways to handle it:

1. **Be honest and transparent:** It is essential to be honest with stakeholders about the state of the project. Share the facts and data, and explain the situation clearly. Avoid using jargon and technical terms that the stakeholders may not understand. Share the potential risks and consequences of the project's failure.

2. **Focus on the positives:** Despite the project's issues, there may be some positive aspects that stakeholders can take away from the situation. Highlight these and acknowledge the work done by the team so far. This will help to maintain their motivation and engagement as you work towards fixing the issues.

3. **Use empathy:** Put yourself in the stakeholders' shoes and understand their perspective. Acknowledge their concerns and frustrations, and show that you understand how the project's issues affect them. This will help to build trust and rapport with the stakeholders, which is crucial for finding resolutions.

4. **Propose a solution:** Don't just focus on the problem - move beyond it; propose specific solutions to fix the issues. Explain what steps need to be taken, who needs to be involved, and how the solution will help to get the project back on track. Be clear and specific about what needs to be done and what outcomes are expected.

5. **Involve the stakeholders in the solution:** Involve the stakeholders in finding a solution to the project's issues. Ask for their input and suggestions, and involve them in decision-making processes. This will help to build ownership and commitment to the solution, which will increase the chances of future success.

Conclusion: The Project Turnaround -

A Cheat Sheet

How to tell if a project may be in trouble
1. Project delays
2. Budget overruns
3. Low team morale
4. Scope creep
5. Lack of communication:
6. Quality issues
7. Stakeholder dissatisfaction
8. Lack of progress

Why do projects get into trouble:
1. Weak planning
2. Lack of resources
3. Unrealistic timelines
4. Scope creep
5. Weak communication
6. Inadequate risk management
7. Lack of stakeholder communication
8. Weak project governance
9. Weak project leadership
10. Inadequate project controls
11. Weak change management
12. Inadequate quality control
13. Lack of training
14. Insufficient testing
15. Inadequate vendor management
16. Political interference
17. Cultural issues
18. Technological issues

Suggested ways to rescue troubled projects
1. Hold a project review meeting
2. Review the project scope and contract
3. Develop a clearer project plan
4. Conduct a root cause analysis
5. Negotiate changes to the project scope or contract(s)
6. Define a change control process
7. Establish a project governance structure
8. Develop a modified project schedule
9. Monitor project progress
10. Ensure necessary resources and skills
11. Develop a communication plan
12. Hold regular status meetings
13. Identify and mitigate project risks
14. Implement a quality control process
15. Develop a dispute resolution process
16. Conduct a post-mortem analysis

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