



The Seven Deadly Sins of Project Management

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Have you ever noticed that when a poorly managed project starts showing symptoms of potential catastrophe or has a significant setback, the overall atmosphere of the project becomes chaotic? If a chaotic atmosphere develops and sets in with the project team, attitudes become negative and the opportunity to fully recover and get the project back on track becomes minimal. These situations happen quickly and easily when a project is poorly managed.

Statistics show that there are common elements found within the structure of poorly managed projects, and each of these elements has such a detrimental effect on a project's success. I refer to them as the seven deadly sins of project management. These deadly sins are not mutually exclusive of each other; often times if you find one of them existing within a project, you will find others there as well.

One of the most detrimental deadly sins is not establishing metrics: baseline, milestone markers, and completion. A thorough assessment of the current state will aid you in identifying each component that will require building, modification, updating, etc. Once the components are identified and the baseline metrics established, a timeline and milestone markers can be set. This timeline should serve as the backbone of the project, a task responsibility list for each project team member, and be monitored carefully and adhered to strictly.

When the timeline and milestone markers are set, it would be another project management deadly sin to not clearly communicate responsibilities, expectations and objectives required to meet the milestone markers. The components that the timeline is based on should be assigned to the project team members and linked back to the timeline. Each project team member is then responsible for his or her assigned components and the readiness of these components as listed in the timeline.

Adherence to the timeline and documenting the progression of the project in conjunction with the timeline and milestone markers is critical to the project, and yet another deadly sin if not done. Linking this documentation to the timeline through quantifying each task with an estimate of the total amount of time necessary to complete it and documenting the percent completed provides the ability to not only monitor the progression of the project in conjunction with the timeline but also identify and correct any workload or responsibility imbalances among the project team members. Project documentation should be available to each project team member at any given time and offer reporting capabilities. An enterprise information portal, such as Microsoft SharePoint, should be used as the primary documentation source. Vitalize has developed a WebShare Repository based upon Microsoft SharePoint as an example.

Maintaining the project timeline effectively should ensure that no deadlines or targeted milestone markers are missed. If any of them are missed, the project is at risk of the domino effect deadly sin; missing one deadline pushes back another and potentially all subsequent deadlines will then be missed. If the project

timeline needs to be adjusted, it is imperative that it is evaluated thoroughly to identify any opportunities to recoup “missed” time.

Recoupment of any missed milestone markers or deadlines should never come at the expense of status check or increment testing. Increment testing during a project is essentially verification that the project is truly progressing in conjunction with the timeline. For example, if each project team member completes the tasks assigned to him or her by a given deadline, it appears that the project is on schedule. However, if no increment testing is done by the project team when each milestone marker is met, there is no way to verify that the project is working as it should be at this particular point of the timeline. If the project moves forward without this verification and the system is flawed, the timeline or the backbone of the project could be rendered ineffective.

The final two deadly sins of project management are often committed together: confusing activity with productivity and focusing on optimization during an implementation project. If the project is progressing as planned without incurring any significant setbacks, often times some of the project team members will begin to focus on optimizing and tweaking what has been built rather than the tasks necessary to adhere to the project timeline. This then leads to activity that is not productive in accordance with the current implementation project. Even worse, this could lead to damaging or breaking a component of the project that is currently functioning properly. If a project component is damaged or broken because a team member who focused on optimization rather than implementation, additional unscheduled time will need to be spent correcting what was done and testing to verify that the correction produces the expected results. In this situation, the time and activity focused on optimization and then correcting that optimization would have been unscheduled and is thereby counterproductive to the project.

Effectively managed projects have thoroughly established metrics, milestone markers, increment testing and documentation. In order to maintain these components of the project, the individual tasks and responsibilities of the project team needs to be clearly communicated, documented, and be the primary objective of each member. The potential ramifications of failing to do even one of these things can be catastrophic to the project. Having the ability to maintain the delicate balance of all of these project components is the responsibility of a qualified Project Manager.

For more information on avoiding pitfalls in project management, contact us at (610) 444.1233 or vcs@getvitalized.com. For more information about VCS’ services and solutions visit our website at www.getvitalized.com.