



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Check Your Project for These Four Warning Signs

Obviously your project is in trouble if you are missing deadlines and consistently exceeding the estimated effort and cost to get work done. However, you may have a project that actually appears to be on schedule, yet you are concerned about potential problems down the road.

There are things that you can look for that will give some sense as to whether there are potential problems lurking. At this point you can't really call them issues or problems, but they can be identified as risks that have the potential to throw your project off in the future.

Are You Falling Behind Early in the Project?

Many project managers fall prey to the belief that if they fall behind in a project early on, they can make up the time through the remainder of the project. Unfortunately, there is a natural tendency to fall behind as the project progresses. First of all, the more distant you look, the less accurate you can estimate. Second, there are always things that come up on your project that you don't expect. It is a good idea for project managers to try to get ahead of schedule early on in the project with the expectation that they will need the extra time later on when things came up that they did not expect.

If you find that you are falling behind early in the project, your best remedy is to start developing corrective plans immediately. Don't sit back passively and hope you can make the time up later. Be proactive instead, and put corrective plans in place today to get back on schedule.

Are You Identifying More and More Risks?

Again, we are trying to identify warning signs that a project may be in trouble, even though it appears to be on schedule. If you have a multitude of issues that you are addressing today, you probably would not be on schedule. However, you may be fine now, yet face a number of identified risks in the future. Of course, all projects have some future risks. However, if you see more and more risks as the project gets going, this could be a big warning sign that your project is in trouble.

If you face this "problem," the good news is that you are identifying risks while there is still time to address them. Even if you have an abnormal number of them, you may still be okay if you really focus on managing them successfully.

Client Participation Starts to Fade

Your client needs to be actively engaged during the planning process and gathering the business requirements. If you cannot get them excited to participate during this timeframe, then you are really in trouble. However, many times the client begins to get disengaged when the project is a third completed and the project work starts to turn more toward the internal project team. It is important to keep the client actively involved. The project manager needs to continue to communicate proactively and seek the client's input



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on all scope changes, issues resolution and risk plans. The client needs to be actively involved in testing for sure. The project manager needs to make sure that the client stays involved and enthusiastic. Otherwise testing and implementation will be a problem down the road.

Morale Starts to Decline

On the surface, if you are on schedule, there is no reason for morale to be going south. If you detect this is happening, it could be a sign that you are in trouble. You need to determine the cause. Morale might be slipping because people are being asked to work a lot of hours to keep the project on track. That would tend to be an indicator of trouble in the future. Another concern on the part of the team is that they may think the future schedule is unrealistic. In any case, poor moral needs to be investigated and combated.

Summary

One of the important responsibilities of a project manager is to continually forecast into the future to update the workplan, identify risks and manage expectations. A project that seems on track today could have major problems tomorrow. So, keep your eyes open for these warning signs that things are worse than they appear. If you recognize them ahead of time, they can all be classified as project risks, and can be managed and controlled in a manner that will allow your project to succeed.