How to Start New Projects

Every time you're given a new project, take these steps to ensure you're on the right track from the outset:

Taking Responsibility: Before you agree to take on the responsibility of managing a project, make sure there is adequate sponsorship, and that you have adequate funding and resources to complete it on time. Your gut feel should be that the project is achievable and that whatever happens, you'll have the full support of your Sponsor through the project. If it's not feasible or you lack support, then solve these two problems first, before you start out.

Clarifying the Scope: Great, so you've agreed to take responsibility. The next step is to review the scope of the project to ensure that all of the deliverables to be produced during the project are adequately defined. You don't want to get part way through the project only to find that your customer actually wanted additional deliverables that weren't planned.

So sit down with your customer and clarify all of the deliverables on day one. The complete set of deliverables forms the "scope" of the project and it's critical that you document these in as much depth as you can, before you get started.

The Deadline: A "Project" is an activity which must be delivered by a specified date. That date is usually called the project "Deadline". You need to agree the deadline with your customer, and it must be feasible to achieve.

Rather than agreeing on a fixed date, instead try and agree on a fixed timeframe for delivery. Set an "ideal delivery date" and a "last delivery date". Make the *ideal delivery date* achievable. That way, the last resort date, which may be a week, month or more later, gives you the contingency you need in case the project is delayed.

Setting Priorities: Now that you have an approved set of deliverables, scope and deadline, you need to set the project priorities. Do this by showing your customer the complete list of deliverables to be produced, and ask them "if for whatever reason, we couldn't complete all of the deliverables on time then which could be done after the deadline, if any?". Push as hard as you can to get them to agree that some deliverables can be produced after the deadline if need be, because it gives you extra contingency for when you need it. Then ask your customer to prioritize

Project Management Templates

We are often asked "which templates should I use for my project", so we thought we'd list them for you here...

Project Initiation

- Business Case
- Feasibility Study
- Project Charter
- Job Description
- PMO Checklist

Project Planning

- Project Plan
- Resource Plan
- Financial Plan
- Quality Plan
- Risk Plan
- Acceptance Plan
- Communications Plan
- Procurement Plan
- Tender Process
- Statement of Work
- Request for Information
- Request for Proposal
- Supplier Contract
- Tender Register

Project Execution

the list of deliverables from highest to lowest so that you can align these priorities with the tasks in your plan.

Understand the Drivers: You really need to understand as much as possible about your customer's business to know why the deadline, scope and priorities have been set as they have. Ask your customer what's driving the deadline, why you can't reduce the scope further and why the deliverables have been prioritized as they have. It's critical that you understand the answers to these questions before you start out, so that you satisfy their requirements in full.

Also, document these conversations with your customer and get them to formally approve them. That way, you have a formal agreement of the scope, deadline, priorities and drivers at the outset.

To help you do this, download the Project Management Kit of templates. They help you document the scope, priorities and business drivers, and then create plans for delivering projects on time. They also include real-life practical examples to save you time.

Buy the Project Management Kit today.

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