



PROJECTSUCCESSinc.

Project Success Method

Worry at the start, so you can celebrate at the summit



Imagine the following all too common scenario. A company must execute a strategically important project, such as the development and introduction of a new product. A deadline has been established, and a cross-functional team has been assigned. The project is similar to projects that have been performed in the past, and the deadline seems to allow enough time to get it done. The project stakeholders believe that the scope, objectives, and constraints are clear, although they have not been documented. Each team member thinks they know what is expected of them based on the functional area they represent. For all these reasons, no formal project planning or control processes seem necessary.

During the first several months of the project, the typical team member's level of worry about the project is very low. There is plenty of time to get the project done, and everybody has more pressing work to do in the near future. Work is delayed as uncertainties arise regarding specific project requirements, and the project stakeholders are slow to clarify expectations. Unanticipated problems are encountered, and work is disrupted.

As the project deadline begins to creep over the horizon, the worry level begins to increase, and the team members begin to protect themselves from impending disaster. These defensive measures often involve pointing fingers at other members of the team and can lead to serious conflict.

Eventually, the project enters the panic phase. The deadline arrives, and the project is not close to being finished. The worry level shoots through the roof, and the team begins to take very expensive actions in a desperate effort to finish the project. Quality is compromised, as required project content is dropped and quality assurance steps are skipped. Stress becomes almost intolerable. The project finally ends significantly late and over budget, and the deliverables fail to meet stakeholder expectations.

This pattern of behavior is not only damaging to organizational performance; it also creates an absolutely miserable work environment and can destroy careers.

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Now let's try a very different approach. This time, the team works together to develop a project plan, and individual team members commit to specific, well-defined responsibilities. The team also commits to meeting on a regular basis (say, every two weeks) throughout the project to report the status of their activities, to solve problems, and to update the plan.

The planning process itself raises the worry level, as the team analyzes the requirements, constraints, assumptions, and risks associated with the project. Also, the fact that the team will meet in two weeks and each team member will report what he or she have (or have not) accomplished, means that pressure for progress is felt from the very beginning of the project.

Soon after the project begins, the team is likely to run into its first problem. The worry level rises, as the team swarms the problem. Once they figure out how to overcome that problem, the worry level drops until the next problem is encountered. The team rides a roller coaster of worry through the project, each peak representing a problem that is uncovered and solved.

The last peak on the roller coaster is the "over the hump" point in the project, where the team members heave a collective sigh of relief. They know the project will be a success. The scariest parts of the project – the parts that involved the greatest risk and uncertainty – are done. They have the time, the resources, and the know-how to complete the project successfully. From this point onward, the project becomes fun, and the team has an opportunity to enhance the quality of their project output even beyond expectations.

Productive "worry" must begin early in the project, rather than after the battle is already lost. By shifting the worry curve forward using *The Project Success Method*, project requirements are clarified, progress begins immediately, the team remains cohesive, panic is avoided, and stakeholder expectations are satisfied, if not exceeded.