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Scheduling Mistakes & How to Fix Them



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By Rhona Aylward

Rhona is the Operations Director, otherwise known as the Deputy Everything Officer, at Psoda. She graduated from Napier University in Edinburgh with an Honours Degree in Applied Microbiology & Biotechnology in 1998 and in her own words “*promptly never did anything scientific again*”.

She has over 14 years international experience in quality and project management, has established several large PMOs and has worked in a number of industries including manufacturing, defence, telecommunications, justice, financial services and government.

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WHAT'S THE MISTAKE?

Mistake 1:

Building your schedule in isolation

“The person who says it will take the longest and cost the most is the only one with a clue how to do the job” – Anon

WHY IT HURTS?

Inaccurate Task Durations

You miss out on your team's knowledge when setting task durations, resulting in overly optimistic or pessimistic durations, e.g. Joe the Solutions Architect knows task can't be done in less than 2 weeks and you schedule it for 4 days.

Team Bonding

You lose out on an opportunity to bring the team together early and to establish the project culture before the project kicks off.

Early Warning

You miss out on early notice of other projects or work that may impact your schedule or have dependencies on your project and *vice versa*

QUICK FIX

Scheduling workshop

Hold a couple of scheduling events with all the project team, white board ideas or use post it notes to plan the project work. This way you'll get the team's buy in to the schedule as well as getting the most accurate durations for tasks.



WHAT'S THE MISTAKE?

Mistake 2:

Not putting in any buffer time

"Work expands to fill (and often exceed) the time allowed" - Parkinson's Law

WHY IT HURTS?

Slippage

Without buffer time when tasks slip, and let's be honest – they almost always do, there's no leeway for catch up so the schedule slips

Unexpected Delays

We've all seen it; everything's going swimmingly and then some event comes out of left field and you're left scrambling to pick up the pieces. Without buffer, you're always going to be on the back foot if something unexpectedly delays a task.

Scope Creep

If your project's scope creeps and you don't have any buffer time, you'll be unlikely to be able to meet the change in requirements

QUICK FIX

Have a pool of buffer time that equates to around 50% of the time to complete the critical path that tasks can borrow from. It sounds like a massive amount of time but in reality it tends to be just enough once all of the little (and not so little) slippages are taken into account.

Different project management methodologies recommend different ways of building buffer time, so do what fits for your organisation.



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WHAT'S THE MISTAKE?

Mistake 3:

Not enough detail in tasks

"What is not on paper has not been said" - Anon

WHY IT HURTS?

Wriggle Room

Vagueness allows people wriggle room. Without clear concise information there is the possibility that people will wriggle around what's required

Lack of Updates

One common way lack of detail manifests itself is in tasks with very long durations. When this is the case they often don't get updated regularly (less than once in 10 days). If your task is too long the chances are you won't find out about problems until it is too late.

Inaccurate Estimates

Lack of detail or very long task durations means that estimates will be inaccurate. This can quickly add up, leading to large over runs in the project.

QUICK FIX

Provide enough detail in the schedule to manage the task, and make sure that the work package contains all of the required information.



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WHAT'S THE MISTAKE?

Mistake 4:

Too much detail in tasks

"If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six hours sharpening my ax" - Abraham Lincoln

WHY IT HURTS?

Micromanagement

If you've got too much detail in the tasks you'll end up spending all your time chasing people for updates instead of letting them get on with the job in hand.

Cumbersome

Too much detail makes the schedule becomes cumbersome and difficult to manage

Annoyance

Lastly but no means least, having too much detail in tasks annoys the heck out of people

QUICK FIX

Make task durations no shorter than 1 day and have all of the detail in the work package instead of the schedule



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WHAT'S THE MISTAKE?

Mistake 5:

Not tracking progress

"If you have a map in a cubby hole and don't use it you're still going to get lost"
- anon

WHY IT HURTS?

Loss of Control

If you don't track progress on tasks you'll have no idea where your project is at or where it should be. You'll very quickly lose control.

Lack of Reporting

By not updating your schedule regularly, you'll be unable to accurately report your project's progress and status to your steering committee

Poor Resource Management

Lack of updates on tasks means that you'll be unable to accurately forecast the demand on your project resources, running the risk that critical resources will be unavailable when you really need them

QUICK FIX

You can track progress against tasks using the tracking progress facility in your project management tool. If you're using an excel spreadsheet it is easy to add a progress column to the spreadsheet. Also check your progress against where you should be so you can see when you are falling behind.



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