IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Muhammad Hamza Ihtisham

Ten Ways to Make Any Software Project Better

Asking the Right Questions

- When you're gathering requirements for your project, you must ask questions of many people, particularly other software project managers.

- Don't forget that other more experienced project managers can be a terrific resource for you.

- One of the most important questions you can ask of your sponsor and appropriate stakeholders is, "How will we know that this project is successful?" Make sure you know what success is supposed to look like for this software project.

Being a Good Communicator

- Don't underestimate the power and importance of communication.

- Stakeholders can tolerate a lot of things, but they will not tolerate being unaware of something that they should have already known.

- Take the time at the start of the project to develop thorough communication plans. Document the method of communication, the receiver of each communication, and the time for each communication. Then, stick to it.

Showing Your Leadership Skills

- Keep in mind that someone can be an effective manager and a so-so leader at the same time. A good manager can track issues and changes, manage resources, and write a great project plan. A leader can keep the project's vision in mind, get others to agree about its direction and goals, and inspire and motivate the software project team to accomplish those goals

Creating the Right Project Plan

- Spoken with the appropriate stakeholders?

- Met with experienced project managers who have already completed similar projects?

- Collaborated with your project team members to understand them strengths, weaknesses, and experiences?

- Understood how each team member can contribute to project success?

- Discussed expectations with your project sponsor so that you both can develop a clear understanding of what project success will look like?

- Documented your software project's assumptions and constraints so that you know how they affect your software project?

- Developed a solid change control system so that you can prevent scope creep?

- Documented and distributed a clear, concise communication plan?

- Created the project charter (or ensured that someone else created it) and received sign-off by the project sponsor?

Finding the Correct Sponsor

- Because the sponsor for your software project is the one you must rely on at crunch time, you want a sponsor who is actively engaged in the project. Avoid a sponsor who has so many other irons in the fire that she won't have the time to focus on project issues.

- You may not always enjoy the luxury of choosing a project sponsor. Many times, you are merely told who the sponsor is. If all this information is moot because you have no say in who your project sponsor is, here's what you can do: Make your sponsor look really, good. Take on all the best attributes you can and then give credit to the sponsor. And smile.

Recognizing Failure Before It Arrives

- Have you or anyone from your project team started to let a few dead lines slip? That's bad. What's worse is if no one's even a bit surprised anymore when deadlines do slip.

- Has your project changed so much you don't recognize it anymore? If too much scope creep has, um, crept in, your project is in danger.

- Are you starting to have a high turnover from your team? If people are dropping like flies (for whatever reason), they are taking knowledge with them. That's bad. But what's worse is if they're leaving because morale is low or because they don't respect their project manager.

- Speaking of low morale, are you seeing signs of it? Are team members bickering more often than usual, losing interest in the project, or putting silly words in the middle of their software code just to see if anyone notices? Are programmers sleeping at their desks, coming in late, leaving early, or taking marathon lunches?

- Has your sponsor been missing meetings with you? Does he or she appear disconnected from the project?

- Have your stakeholders started getting a vacuous look in their eyes whenever you mention deliverables and risks?

- Has the sponsor started to micromanage you? Do you lack the autonomy you need to bring the project to a successful completion?

Planning, Planning, and a Little More Planning

There are five process groups involved in project management. These process groups are

- Initiation
- Planning
- Executing
- Monitoring and controlling
- Closing

- Developing project management plans
- Developing project schedules
- Defining project scope
- Estimating duration of activities
- Estimating costs and budgets
- Documenting communication plans
- Creating risk management and quality management plans
- Planning the scope
- Creating the work breakdown structure
- Determining the project sequence of activities
- Estimating the types and quantities of project resources

Documenting Your Project Even if You Don't Want To

- **Start early:** Most people start their lessons learned documents at the end of a project, but they should start this documentation at the beginning of a project. Create a spreadsheet that has placeholders for each area of your project and then add to this document as the project progresses. By the time you close the project, you will already have a nearly complete lessons learned document that you and others can use for your future software projects.

- **Make it a group thing:** You could even make lessons learned an agenda item for each of your project team meetings. After team members become accustomed to seeing this lessons learned document and watching it grow as the project progresses, they will start feeling owner ship of the document. The project team will also get used to thinking in terms of every issue or problem resulting in a lesson learned instead of just considering problems as something to overcome.

- **Spread it around:** When your software project is complete, you can dis tribute the lessons learned document to your project team and then complete it with the team during the post project review meeting. Your team, your sponsor, and all the stakeholders over all the land will be in awe of your superior project management powers.

Hosting a Successful Project Meeting

Meeting Agenda for Review of Training Methodology

Meeting Date:	Tuesday, November 12
Meeting Time:	1:00–2:00 p.m.
Meeting Location:	Room 123A
Facilitator:	Mary
Recorder:	Tony
Meeting Invitees:	Bob, Tom, Sue, Mary, Tony, Glenda, Gladys, Roger
Meeting Purpose:	The purpose of this meeting is to review the training methodology for the software that will be implemented on June 10 of next year.
Agenda Item 1:	Discuss the three basic training methodologies (1:00–1:30 p.m. [Tony])
Agenda Item 2:	Review the CBT (1:30–1:45 p.m. [Glenda])
Agenda Item 3:	Questions and Next Steps (1:45–2:00 p.m. [Tony])
Next Meeting:	Tuesday, November 19
Next Meeting Location:	Room 123B

- **Start the meeting on time**. The best way to get people to be at a meeting on time is to gain a reputation for always starting a meeting on time.

- **Stay on topic.** When someone brings up a topic that is not on your agenda, offer to place that item on the parking lot, which is a document where you keep items to be discussed at a later time.

- **Play the librarian.** When two or more people begin to have a side discussion, calmly remind them that everyone needs to stay focused and stay away from side topics. Is that subtle enough? After you say that once, you're unlikely to say it again.

- **Always talk about follow-ups**. The last agenda item should include next steps or follow up. Before they leave the meeting, all attendees should have a clear understanding as to what will happen next and when it should happen.

- **Don't let the minutes pass you by.** Always, without fail, every time, forever, follow up each meeting with meeting minutes. Distribute them as soon after the meeting as possible and be sure to ask for corrections or additions to the minutes.