10 Debugging/Troubleshooting tips and best practices for a project

There are times when project managers underestimate the importance of some or all the factors that play a significant role in the implementation of a project. This means, some projects end up being cancelled before their planned date of completion. Projects can be cancelled for various reasons including:

* Cost and time overruns
* Change in scope
* Overambitious project goals
* Lack of a risk management plan
* Incompetent project managers
* Poorly defined objectives
* Lack of project sponsorship and leadership
* Lack of project management control
* Inability to consult key stakeholders

Project Troubleshooting Tips

1. Before starting a project, consider getting a project sponsor committed to the research objectives. The sponsor should have sufficient influence in the organization. A good project sponsor will help the project manager overcome organizational challenges.
2. Find out who are the project’s key stakeholders. Keep them abreast of important information and developments throughout the life of the project. Create a stakeholder communication program with the help of the project team and sponsor(s).
3. Organize a meeting between the stakeholders and sponsor to discuss the measures of success for the project. Some of the questions to answer in the meeting include how the sponsors and key stakeholders will know that the project has succeeded? What indicates that the project is a success? This meeting is meant to get everyone on the same page before the commencement of the project.
4. Determine the methodology that will be used in the project. Find out the phases that the project will go through, the most important go/no go decision points and the expected project outcome in each phase.
5. Draw up the project schedule. It should clearly indicate the tasks allocated to each member of the project team. Identify those tasks that rely on others for their successful completion. The progress of the schedule should be communicated to the project’s team members and sponsors.
6. Review and authorize all the changes that have to be made in the course of the project implementation. Evaluate all the proposed changes and determine their impacts on project schedule, cost and quality.
7. Do not let an unforeseen event derail the project. Determine all the possible factors that might threaten the project and create risk mitigation strategies. Incorporate the strategies into the project plan. Various issues may come up in the course of a project. Project managers should keep track of the issues and communicate their effects to relevant parties.
8. Decide from the onset which documents should be generated at different points of the project. Small and medium sized projects require manageable levels of documentation to reduce risk to the project.
9. Once the project ends, use the measures of success agreed on at the start of the project to evaluate the performance of the project. Determine if the project was within budget and schedule, if it produced desired results and what can be learnt from the experience. Write a report and hand it to the project sponsor and key stakeholders.
10. Follow up with the project stakeholders and team and find out what they felt about the project. From their points of view, was the project a success and did the project have any impact on their personal lives. From their responses, the project manager can determine the points of success and failure. The lessons should be applied to the next project.

Best Practices When Troubleshooting

Create a Process

This does not just help a project manager fix issues that may arise in project implementation but it also helps them avoid the problems altogether. This involves mapping out the due date for the project and steps that should be taken for successful project completion. Project managers should give themselves enough time to deal with unforeseen issues. Creating a process helps project supervisors manage multiple projects and clients.

Strategize

Use different strategies to deal with issues. Those who stick to the same strategy but still run into problems should try to look for different ways of solving the problems. Lay all the options on the table and determine the strategy that will offer the best results.

A new strategy should be carefully evaluated, monitored and implemented to ensure it does not create more problems. If the new strategy proves more successful in solving a problem, indicate it in the project report for use in future projects.

Pool Brainpower

The best ideas may come from other people and not necessarily the project leader. In case a difficult issue arises, the project manager should not be ashamed of seeking assistance from other people in the team or even those outside the team. Third parties can be the best people to seek assistance from because they may have a different view of the issue and may spot the problem as well as its solution.

Take a Break

This may sound like the most ineffective step to take when there is an issue. Some project managers may have the misconception that they should sit on their desks until they find a solution to a problem. However, this may stop them from seeing the issue and finding a successful path around the problem. Taking a break allows a project manager to rest and get a better chance at solving the problem with a fresh mind.

Talk to Clients

This may sound like an unprofessional thing to do when there is a problem because the project manager is the expert. However, most clients appreciate being kept on the loop on the progress of a project. The project runs because of their sponsorship. In addition, problems may call for different strategies to be used. The changes have to be communicated to the project sponsor and key stakeholders.

The most important aspect in project management is results. Project managers do not get into the profession because they want to work 8 hours a day but because they crave productivity and efficiency. Project troubleshooting and best practices require the right mix of planning, monitoring and control to make it a success. At the end of a project, the project manager should ask, was the project completed on time? Was it on budget? Did the project produce quality results?