

Death Star II: A Project Management Case Study



Michael Lortz

Nov 30, 2015 · 12 min read ★



A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away ...

In the midst of a conflict with the Rebel Alliance, the leader of the Galactic Empire

Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Designed by Imperial Engineer Bevel Lemelisk, architect of the original Death Star, the second Death Star was larger in scale and scope than its predecessor. The second Death Star was to be a self-sustaining, planet orbiting battlestation measuring 160 kilometers in diameter. Keeping in mind the flaws of the first Death Star, Lemelisk designed the new battlestation with millions of millimeter-wide heat ducts and enhanced weaponry. In total, the battlestation contained 7,500 laser cannons, 768 tractor beam generators, hanger space for 13,000 support craft, bedding and personal space for nearly 500,000 personnel , and a concave dish composite beam superlaser . Despite his previous failure, Lemelisk was confident that when complete his new Death Star was indestructible.

The project manager for the second Death Star was Imperial officer Tiaan Jerjerrod. Jerjerrod was an experienced member of the Imperial military with a background in logistics and supply. He was appointed to lead the project by Emperor Palpatine, who selected Jerjerrod over several other higher-ranking candidates. Jerjerrod was responsible for not only the construction of the Death Star, but also organizing the defense of the Death Star's planetary shield and control bunker on a nearby planet . Supervising Jerjerrod was the Emperor's right-hand man, Darth Vader.

Aided by the development of self-replicating construction droids, the second Death Star took far less time to build, despite its bigger size. In order to facilitate logistics for the massive battlestation, the Empire created an interspace "hyperlane" that brought supplies to the Death Star from the planet of Sullust . This hyperlane and other enhancements in technology allowed the Empire to complete 60% of the construction of the second Death Star in only six months .

Three and a half years later construction of the second Death Star had slowed



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

the Galactic leader himself visited the project. Jerjerrod then informed Vader that his men would “double their efforts” to reach the Emperor’s schedule.

Unbeknownst to Jerjerrod, the Rebel Alliance was planning an attack on the Death Star and attempting to destroy the project before its completion. By the time the Emperor arrived on the Death Star, the weaponry of the battlestation was complete. The Emperor intentionally leaked the blueprints of the battlestation to Rebel spies and hoped to use the incomplete status of the project and his presence on board to lure Rebel forces into a conflict.

As the Emperor planned, the Rebel Alliance did attack the Death Star. The attack meant construction of the battlestation ceased and personnel aided the war effort instead of the project effort. For Jerjerrod, supporting the battle meant becoming commander of the bridge of the battlestation. The former logistics and supply officer assumed operational command of the most advanced war machine in the galaxy.

Unfortunately for Jerjerrod and the Empire, the Rebel Alliance were able to destroy the control bunker on the nearby planet and disable the Death Star’s defense shield. With the shield down, Rebel ships penetrated the battlestation’s defenses and advanced inside the facility towards the main reactor. The Rebel ships fired missiles at the reactor’s primary central tower. The destruction of the primary control tower created a chain reaction which created a massive explosion that resulted in the destruction of the Death Star. In the explosion Emperor Palpatine, Tiaan Jerjerrod, and thousands of crew members lost their lives.

The inability to complete the Death Star and fulfil the Tarkin Doctrine was due to several poor decisions by the Galactic Empire. Many of these decisions fall into the ten Project Management knowledge areas as defined by the Guide to Project Management



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It’s free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Delays, programming malfunctions, and leadership insistence on bringing the war to the project hindered the completion of the Death Star. Completion of the project became an afterthought. Unfortunately, Jerjerrod could not object to the reprioritizing of the project due to his lower officer rank. Jerjerrod did not realize the strategy had been changed until it was too late. Perhaps if he was involved in upper level discussions, he might have been able to question why the complete assembly of the concave super laser was required prior to the completion of the rest of the Death Star.

Scope

However large and immense, the scope of the second Death Star was maintained throughout the project. Jerjerrod was under an expectation to complete a battlestation of incredible size and strength. No additional features were added during the build nor any taken away.

Given his low officer rank, Jerjerrod could not have altered the scope even if he desired. He was beholden to the commands and scope provided by Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine.

Time

Time was a major problem in the construction of the second Death Star. Despite new technology that decreased construction time from 19 years to approximately 4 years, Jerjerrod was put under a time schedule that he deemed “impossible” to carry out. When his work force was threatened by Darth Vader’s harsh negative motivation techniques, Jerjerrod compromised by having his men “double their efforts” to achieve the scheduled completion.

The circumstances surrounding the build of the second Death Star was also an issue.



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Cost

There is no doubt the construction of the second Death Star was a costly endeavor. Total cost, however, may have been less than the construction of the first Death Star due to better technology and improved supply routes. Funds to complete the project were acquired via government taxes. There is no evidence of a total budget, although several websites have predicted the project may have cost approximately \$852,000,000,000,000,000 . By following the aforementioned Tarkin Doctrine, the Empire clearly favored security and military force over austerity.

Cost of the second Death Star included steel, electronics, ordinance, services, and labor . As the construction of the project was quicker, it is possible to assume the Empire used contracted labor . By hiring contractors, the Empire was probably able to control costs by buying services from the lowest bidder. Perhaps opting for the lowest bidder was why construction time slowed towards the end of the project.

Quality

As the Imperial military oversaw the construction of the second Death Star, the project was overseen by military personnel and held to a military standard. Development of the second Death Star was under the purview of the Imperial Department of Military Research . With eventual oversight also provided by Darth Vader, quality in construction was not a problem.

Assurance, however, was a problem for the project manager of the second Death Star. Jerjerrod was not able to convince Darth Vader the high-profile project would be completed on time. The delay in construction also drew the ire of the Emperor, the leader of the entire Imperial government. It is probably not a good sign when the leader of the government decided to be personally involved in the construction of a



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

This attitude of fear began at the top, where Darth Vader used intimidation and physical force to enforce standards. The culture of fear and authority also led to distrust of subordinates. In one example, Jerjerrod did not trust a lower ranking officer to monitor the arrival of a new computer core. Jerjerrod's distrust allowed the central computer core of the battle station to be controlled by a virus.

Communication Management

Due to the aforementioned culture of fear, communication management was not a strength of the Death Star project. Lack of communication occurred at several levels. The project manager, Tiaan Jerjerrod, did not accurately communicate the status of the project to Darth Vader. This miscommunication led to the Emperor visiting the Death Star to oversee the project's final stages.

Whereas communication was a problem in middle management, it was a bigger problem at the upper levels of the Imperial government. It is doubtful the Emperor told anyone involved in the construction of the project that he was using the battle station as bait for a large battle with the Rebel Alliance. Had they known their work and lives would be in danger, construction crews might have worked as hard.

Risk Management

The construction of the second Death Star faced many risks. Few of the risks were managed properly. Risks that were managed well include security of the site, use of droids as labor, installation of the defense shield, and confidence in clone technology to re-animate key personnel. Risks that were managed properly include overassigning responsibilities, using the project as bait for a military conflict, and not double checking core programming.

This final risk — not double-checking core programming — almost cost Jerjerrod the



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

project manager, Tiaan Jerjerrod, was a logistics and supply officer who had risen to the rank of general through his hard work and tenacity in logistics and supply. His background helped push the Death Star project forward.

The Empire acquired many of their resources through selective outsourcing. They acquired hyperspace tugs and threadships from the planet Sullust and contracted Xizor Transport Systems to ship construction material from other parts of the galaxy. These materials were shipped via the Sanctuary Pipeline, a hyperspace lane that was expanded by the Empire to facilitate Death Star supply procurement.

Stakeholders

Stakeholder management during the construction of the second Death Star was mixed at best. While the Galactic Empire worked to complete the project, the Rebel Alliance was plotting its destruction. Other stakeholders included residents of the nearby planet, who might have seen climate change due to the presence of a moon-sized battle station in their orbit, and the Imperial Department of Military Research. Jerjerrod had to manage, satisfy, or defend each of the shareholders.

Jerjerrod was unable to manage stakeholder expectations and control the influence and engagement of higher ranking Imperial stakeholders. Jerjerrod did not share accurate information on the status of the project with Darth Vader and the Emperor, causing the two leaders to personally inspect the project. Jerjerrod lost control of the project the moment one of his stakeholders trumped his influence and ability to lead.

The Death Star and the Classic Mistakes of Project Management

The failure to complete the second Death Star can also be attributed to several of Project Management's "Classic Mistakes". These Classic Mistakes are at the root of



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Manager Tiaan Jerjerrod.

Friction between the developers and customers occurred when the customers decided the workforce was falling behind schedule. The delay was recognized as such a high risk for executive management that Darth Vader made an unexpected visit the project. When he confronted Tiaan Jerjerrod about the schedule, Jerjerrod pushed back, stating his men were working as fast as they could. Vader overrode the objection, and said if needed he would step in a “motivate” the workforce himself. By the time the Emperor arrived on the battle station, Vader insisted he put the workforce back on schedule. Standing behind Vader as the deputy spoke with the Galactic leader, Jerjerrod watched as his credibility was completely undermined by the executive leadership.

The second Classic Mistake the Empire fell victim to was “Unrealistic Expectations” (Classic Mistake #8). As mentioned in the introduction, the first Death Star was completed in 19 years. Tiaan Jerjerrod was instructed to complete the second larger battle station in a quarter of the time. This was an impossible task even for an accomplished general officer.

From the perspective of executive management, there was a need to expedite construction of the second Death Star. First and foremost, the Empire needed the battle station to seize and secure its strategic advantage over the Rebel Alliance. The faster the battle station could be completed, the faster the Empire could put the Death Star in service and focus on governing, not war.

Expectations were also higher for the second Death Star due to advancements in technology and logistics. While these advancements were effective output multipliers, it was unrealistic to think they could cut the completion time by 80 percent. These



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Internally, the cutthroat culture of the Empire is another example of politics affecting the project's completion. In the Empire, gaining favor of superiors was looked upon highly. The competitive environment meant even the project manager attempted to overstep his superior to gain favor with the ruler of the Empire. The idea of completing the project was secondary to its surrounding political environment.

In the final year of construction, the Death Star's project manager succumbed to Classic Mistake 22: Shortchanged quality assurance. When the central computer core arrived at the battle station, Jerjerrod reprimanded the local supervisor, which left neither man time to inspect the system. Had they taken the time, they would have found a bug in programming that allowed it to be controlled by a malicious robot named IG-88.

Each of these four Classic Mistakes contributed to the failure to complete the second Death Star. There is no doubt the Empire could have completed the project eventually. However, when these Classic Mistakes added up, there was no way the second Death Star would ever reach its completion.

Star Wars

Project Management

Case Study



66 claps



WRITTEN BY

Michael Lortz



Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.

 Sign up with Google

 Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Medium

[About](#) [Help](#) [Legal](#)

Get one more story in your member preview when you sign up. It's free.



Sign up with Google



Sign up with Facebook

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)