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Section 13 – Troubleshooting

**THE MUST HAVE BOOK
for IT Programme & Project Managers**

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13. Trouble Shooting

13.1 Introduction

This section covers trouble shooting. As a Project Manager you will run into issues and problems that you may need assistance to understand the cause and progress a solution. This section recognises known problems and offers possible solutions.

13.2 My plan is slipping

Problem Description: My project plan is slipping. Tasks are not being achieved on time; tasks are not completing when I expect them to.

Summary: If you have planned tasks that are not completing when you expect them to there can be many different reasons. Each task in the plan has a number of components that effect the completion date, such as the estimated duration, number of resources assigned to the task, working calendar being used, expected hours per day being worked and any dependencies to other tasks.

Causes & Recommended Actions:

Cause: The estimates that you have obtained may not be accurate for a particular task or for all the tasks in that stage of the plan.

Action: Speak to the source of the estimate, review how the estimate was calculated, and check the validity of the estimate. Should it be increased? Where was the flaw in the calculation of the estimate? Once you have these answers then adjust the estimates in the plan, review the impact and agree this with your manager.

Cause: The task may not have enough resources assigned to it or you may have lost some manpower due to unexpected absence or holiday.

Action: Check the task to see if a full complement of resources allocated to the task are really available and being utilised. If not speak with the resources to see what they are doing and re-align their work as required.

Cause: The working calendar you are using; assuming a product such as MS Project has the incorrect settings for working hours, working days, bank holidays or resource holidays.

Action: Check the working calendar in the project plan to ensure that the standard hours per day are correct, standard working days are correct, bank holidays are appropriately set for the country where the resource is working from, resource holidays are scheduled correctly. Once you have these answers then adjust the calendar in the plan, review the impact and agree this with your manager.

Cause: The tasks you have may have dependencies on other tasks that are running late.

Action: Check the tasks and associated dependencies to see if the dependency links are valid. If this is the cause of the delay, discuss the dependency link with your manager and see what can be done to remove the link or manage the impact more effectively.

13.3 I don't have the time to control governance

Problem Description: My project is struggling to handle all the standards, processes and procedures being applied by governance.

Summary: To manage a project well you must apply a good level of governance; it is possible to apply too much governance and restrict a programme or project; apply too little and the project will be delayed by a lack of process and procedural control.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The governance process may be too strict and time consuming.

Action: Review your governance with the PMO and ensure that the information being asked for is both meaningful, relevant and being used in the programme or project; if it is not being used stop that particular process or procedure. Look to automate reporting, simplify the process, combine reports or obtain support in managing governance.

Cause: The governance process may not be followed correctly, resulting in a lack of control and a lack of access to information to drive control, reporting and decision making.

Action: Review each aspect of governance and ensure it is being applied as required, templates being used, the use of templates is understood, in the format requested. Ask for PMO support or an internal audit review.

Cause: The incorrect use of governance or a lack of governance will hinder your project and delay progress.

Action: Ensure that your management team and resources are following governance, that risks, issues, reports, documentation and sign-offs are being carried out and delivered. If your team follows governance you will not waste time chasing governance work and will be able to concentrate on managing the project.

Cause: You do not have, or are not fully utilising, your PMO to help apply and police governance.

Action: Ensure that you are fully utilising your PMO; meet with them to discuss the services they can provide; talk to other Project Managers to see how they use the PMO. If you don't have a PMO look into getting one set up.

Cause: Key individuals may not understand governance.

Action: Organise education/training for these individuals.

13.4 I need more resources

Problem Description: I don't have enough resources to complete the work in the plan.

Summary: If your plan is slipping due to a lack of resources, it could be due to poor estimates (see *My plan is slipping, section 13.2*) or a genuine lack or loss of available resources.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: Your resources are not working as hard as you expected.

Action: Review each resource's workload and output; assess their performance. Are they worn out, lacking the skills, lacking the experience or, do they just work at a slower rate than others? If any of these issues apply; firstly try to address them and improve the productivity; secondly assess the impact on plan and adjust the future tasks, or obtain additional resource support; consider overtime.

Cause: Your resource does not have the correct skills or level of experience.

Action: Review each resource and assess if they need to be trained up further to carry out the role; look to bolster their lack of knowledge by pairing them up with a more experienced resource. Review the task and adjust the duration as required or provide additional resources and consider overtime.

Cause: You have the maximum number of resources assigned and they are struggling to all get the work done without tripping over each other.

Action: Review the overall resource allocation. You may have too many resources on the task and they are slowing each other up, clashing, or having to wait for one another to progress before they can move on. Restructure the task, split it into sub tasks, move some resources onto other work and re-schedule their work later.

Cause: The resource allocation to the task has reached critical mass.

Action: For every task in your project plan there is a resource critical mass; this is the point at which adding more resources to a task no longer reduces the duration required to complete the work.

If your task has reached the resource critical mass there is not more benefit to be had by adding more resources; you will need to either try to split the task or notify management that nothing can be done and you have to take the impact of the delay caused.

Cause: You have lost resources due to holidays, sickness and leavers.

Action: Review the resources available and look at re-allocation and recruitment where possible.

Cause: You have been relying on a single key resource, who is not available, or not as productive as expected.

Action: Look to bolster that resource, get another person to shadow them to gain the skills; you will then have more resources on the work and a fall-back position.

13.5 I cannot afford to let the team have time off

Problem Description: My programme or project is using every resource available and I cannot afford to give people time off.

Summary: You must face the fact that your resources have a right to have time off; they will also be restricted by the school holidays and costs as to when holidays can be taken.

So you must be flexible and allow holidays whenever possible. Your starting position should always be to answer "yes" to a request for holiday, then try to justify why you would not want them to be off.

You can also set guidelines at the beginning of the programme or project.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: You are running a plan that is far too tight regarding resource usage.

Action: Review your plan and adjust the resource levels or durations of the task, especially tasks not on the critical path.

Cause: You are running a plan that has not correctly accounted for and planned holiday for resources.

Action: Review your plan and check that all resources have holiday planned in as standard; where possible get real holiday dates from individuals.

13.6 I am running out of budget

Problem Description: My project is spending the budget far quicker than my plan predicted.

Summary: If your project is spending budget at a faster rate than you expect you must review the entire plan and act immediately, report the issue to Senior Management and make them aware that you are carrying out the review letting them know the outcome as soon as possible.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The cost of hardware is greater than expected.

Action: Speak to the technicians and fully understand the change in pricing. See if discounts can be negotiated; see if the price will continue to change; see if some hardware can be taken out of scope. Then completely review the hardware aspect of the budget, re-calculate the new forecast, and gain approval for the revised budget.

Cause: The cost of software is greater than expected.

Action: Speak to the technicians and fully understand the change in pricing. See if discounts can be negotiated; see if the price will continue to change; see if you can purchase bulk or international licences at a cheaper price; see if some software or software licensing can be taken out of scope. Then completely review the software aspect of the budget, re-calculate the new forecast and gain approval for the revised budget.

Cause: The cost of resources; the daily or hourly rate, is greater than expected.

Action: Speak to the resource provider and fully understand the change in pricing. See if discounts can be negotiated; see if the price will continue to change; see if the resource can be changed and obtained from a cheaper source, internally, a direct contractor, or a different 3rd party supplier.

See if the work can be dropped from scope; is it still a high priority requirement. Then completely review the hardware aspect of the budget and re-calculate the new forecast and gain approval for the revised budget.

Cause: The project has been delayed, extending the duration and using more budget than expected.

Action: Confirm this is the cause, then review the expect completion date of the project and recalculate the required budget; add in contingency and request approval for the budget increase.

13.7 My team is tired and losing focus

Problem Description: My team is showing signs of losing focus on the goal and productivity has dropped.

Summary: My team is losing focus; they are starting to miss milestone dates, leave work early and request additional holiday.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: One of your team may be tired due to overwork and/or personal issues that are overstressing them.

Action: Speak to the individual; get to the bottom of the problem. If you think it will be difficult for the individual to explain the reason to you, ask a close friend to help. Once the issues are uncovered look to reduce the individual's work load; consider giving them time off work, a day or days to recover their strength.

You may feel your project cannot afford to give the individual the time off, but if you don't you will lose them to sickness, which can have a far greater impact, as a doctor may sign them off for weeks rather than days.

Also when they are signed off you will not be able to speak to them to resolve issues and keep other aspects of the project on track.

Cause: A number of your team may be tired due to overwork and/or personal issues that are overstressing them.

Action: Speak to the team to assess the size of the problem. You need to understand from the team if they think this is a short term issue that will be overcome very soon, or a long term issue that requires more drastic action such as obtaining more resources or re-planning the work.

You may feel your project cannot afford to give the team the time off, if you don't you will lose them to sickness, which can have a far greater impact, as a doctor may sign them off for weeks rather than days.

Also when they are signed off you will not be able to speak to them to resolve issues and keep other aspects of the project moving.

Cause: The cause could be work stagnation; the individuals or teams are tired of working on the same tasks.

Action: Look to swap team members around to alleviate stagnation; but this will reduce productivity for a while so review your plan.

13.8 My team are not supporting governance

Problem Description: My team is reluctant to embrace the need for project governance. They are not getting their reports in on time or following process and procedure.

Summary: You need to explain to your team the importance of governance, why it is needed, where it is needed and when it is needed. It is important that governance is followed to ensure that the team and management can see what progress is being made, what risks and issues need to be progressed and so the management team can stay proactive and not become reactive to problems.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The team may be overworked.

Action: Speak to the team and confirm that they have the time to complete the reports, that they understand the level of detail required in the reports, that they are aware of the report template that makes reporting easy.

Cause: The team may be unclear on priorities.

Action: Speak to the team and make it clear that the plan allows time for reporting to be produced; explain that the reporting is key to monitoring progress, aligning resources, managing budget, scheduling other activity and reporting progress to Senior Management, and takes priority for 1 hour a week.

Cause: The team may not be clear about what governance means and how it is to be applied.

Action: Speak to the team and explain all the areas of governance that are being applied to the programme or project; this may be best done via a presentation to the whole team in a short workshop.

Provide enough detail where necessary to explain what to do and how to do it. You may need to draft a set of governance guidelines for the team to follow; a useful tool for the team and any newcomers.

13.9 I cannot get documentation signed off

Problem Description: I have sent out documentation for review and sign-off and I am not getting sign-off confirmation from the relevant areas.

Summary: Often documents sent out are large and take time to review and understand; some documents may need to be read in conjunction with others. The key thing is that the documents are sent out and time given for people to review and provide feedback; the feedback is then processed and the document progressed to a sign-off position.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The documents may not be clear to all parties reading it.

Action: It is often necessary to ensure that the document is structured to meet the needs of the wider scope of the audience reviewing it; this will mean the minor part of the audience will struggle to understand the document. You may need to sit down with some individuals one-to-one, to explain specific details of the document before they will be happy to sign it off.

Cause: The audience for the document may not be available to review and sign-off.

Action: Before you send out a document for review you should consider the audience that is required to provide sign-off and the audience that is required to review for information. The ideal situation is for all the people required to provide sign-off to also have their deputy listed in the information distribution list. This will both alert you if any individual is not unavailable and give you a better chance of achieving sign-off.

Cause: The audience is not aware of the due date for sign-off.

Action: When you send out a document for review or sign-off, you must make it clear when the response is required by; usually a minimum of 5 working days should be allowed to provide sign-off or provide feedback to the contrary.

Cause: The document is too large.

Action: If you have a document that is very large you may need to break it into sections, or hold a workshop to take the audience through the document to obtain sign-off.

Cause: The document may not be true to its title or objective.

Action: Before a document is sent out for review and sign-off it must undergo an internal review within your own team; you must confirm a number of key points:

- General document structure
- There are no typos
- The title/objective of the document is true to the content
- Table of context up-to-date
- Headers and footers correct
- Version numbers, author and release dates are correct
- Correct sign-off and distribution lists

The main point is bullet point 3 above; often a document will fail sign-off because the document is not sticking strictly to the remit of the document title and objective. An example would be a requirements document that includes details about a proposed solution. You will struggle to obtain sign-off because the reader would be concerned that they are also signing off the proposed solution, which they may not agree with.

In such cases the information that is not relevant to the document must be stripped out and the document re-issued.

Cause: The version numbers have not been changed so it is unclear what version of the document is being signed off.

Action: You must correct the version numbers and re-issue the document to all parties.

13.10 The Test Environment is unstable

Problem Description: My project is being delayed by the test environment being unstable and holding up the start of testing, stopping testing, or causing defects to be raised unnecessarily.

Summary: Before any testing starts you should ensure that the test environment has passed shakedown, that all services have been proven and basic regression testing has been carried out to prove configuration and stability.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The environment build specification may not be correct.

Action: Review the build specification against the live production build specification, plus any new release enhancements not against a previously built environment. Get the environments corrected and the shakedown tests modified as required and rerun.

To continue without doing this would be foolhardy because if the environment is not the same as live production all you're testing may be invalid.

Cause: The environment shakedown may not have been carried out correctly.

Action: Ensure the environment shakedown requirements are clear, if not get them updated and signed off. Then re-initiate the shakedown tests, witnessing the process as required to gain confidence, and then once shakedown sign-off has been achieved restart testing.

Cause: The change control and security of the environment may be in question.

Action: Ensure that full change control is in place over the environment, that access has been restricted to only those who now require it.

Ensure change control has been initiated, that all parties are aware that testing has started and that no changes of any kind are allowed to be made to the environment without first gaining authorisation from the Project Manager or Testing Manager.

Cause: The batch processing is running jobs you are not aware of.

Action: Before you start testing ensure all parties are aware of the requirements to run any specific batch processing; that batch jobs are not run without your specific authorisation that batch jobs run to

completion before you roll the logical environment system date and time over to the next business day.

5. Cause: The build process is not documented and consistently applied.

Action: Review the build process and the documentation to ensure that the quality is up to standard and being maintained; review the build process.

13.11 The pressure is getting too much

Problem Description: The project you are managing is getting on top of you; you are not coping with the amount of work.

Summary: You are a Project Manager, not a genius or miracle worker. You are human and you can end up with too much work on your plate. Remember you have a team to support you, use them to help progress tasks; delegate work to others that have the ability or re-schedule the delivery date for your own tasks in your diary.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: You have agreed to do more work than you have time for.

Action: Review your workload, tasks that do not need to be done right now; re-schedule to complete when they are required. Don't work on tasks that can wait till another day, concentrate on tasks that have an immediate requirement that needs satisfying.

Cause: You have agreed to delivery dates that are not achievable.

Action: Speak to the parties you are delivering to and review the delivery dates for the task. You may find the delivery date can move or other factors have changed the situation, meaning the delivery date is false and a new date can be set. Review dependencies that may be driving delivery dates; check that the dependencies are still valid and the dates correct.

Cause: You are not using your team to delegate work to.

Action: You need to delegate more work to the team working for you; you need to assess the ability of the individuals and their skills and delegate the work out. Remember that a less experienced member of the team may work slower on a task, but that could still be quicker than you will get it done with your current workload.

Remember to allow some time to review the work they have done. You have not totally relinquished all responsibility for the work.

Also, remember it may be relevant to delegate some tasks upwards to your Senior Manager; the task may have previously been delegated down to you for the same reason, but their time may be available now to take the task back.

Cause: The project is bigger than one Project Manager can handle.

Action: Once a project gets going you may find the scope increasing and the overall size being far bigger than originally expected. In such cases it will be relatively straightforward to request support or another resource to take the same role as you.

Cause: You are accepting work that you cannot complete.

Action: Don't be a 'Yes Man'. Some people are 'Yes Men', everything they are asked to do, they say yes to without considering the consequences. You must always think about what you are agreeing to do, and when it is required by, before you commit to do the work.

13.12 The last meeting was a nightmare

Problem Description: The last meeting was very difficult, no progress was made on the issues, and there was a lot of animosity.

Summary: Some meetings are harder than others; your team and other attendees will have different agendas and objectives they want to achieve from the meeting; you need to draw out these and get them on the table to be able to address them; you want open and honest meetings.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: The agenda was not clear.

Action: Ensure the agenda is clear so all parties understand what the meeting is about, what the scope of the meeting is. They can then come fully prepared; they can also ensure that the correct people are attending the meeting to achieve the objectives.

Cause: The previous meetings minutes were inaccurate, causing disagreement.

Action: Minutes of meetings should be kept as short as possible, only recording the key points, important decisions and actions. Ensure they are reviewed by the other meeting attendees before they are issued, if possible.

Cause: The chairing of the meeting was weak.

Action: The chairperson must drive the meeting to work to the agenda, stick to the meeting scope, address the key issues, ensure that all parties get the time to provide input and get their say. Try to ensure that all parties are happy with the result of a discussion before you move on to the next point, or that they at least understand the reason for the decision and can see that it is justified.

Be aware that not all meetings will complete all agenda items. If the item being discussed requires extended time allow it to take the additional time and re-arrange another meeting to complete the agenda later.

Cause: The meeting lacked focus due to it not being face to face.

Action: Re-schedule the meeting to be a face to face meeting, making the effort to travel; all parties will feel more confident that you are committed to the outcome.

In a face-to-face meeting you will often achieve much more. You will have more time; you will have social time before and after the meeting to build relationships and develop a more coherent team.

Cause: In the meeting are you just listening to the voices or really hearing what they are saying?

Action: You must hear what they are saying and act on what people are asking of you, even if you don't necessarily agree with them. You may need to give up some ground before you can start gaining some ground.

13.13 There is a lack of respect

Problem Description: The team has a lack of respect for you as the Project Manager.

Summary: When a team is pulled together for a project it is key to start to build relationships, common understanding and trust. A project start-up drink is a good way to initiate the programme or project.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: You may be listening, but are you hearing what your team are telling you? Listen to them, hear what they are saying, acting on what they are telling you.

Action: You must hear what your team are saying to you, and then react to their comments, by telling them what you are doing, what you are not doing or why you are doing things. A great deal of respect is driven from basic daily communication.

Cause: You are not leading by example.

Action: Your team will not respect you if you don't lead by example. If you expect your team to come in early and work late, you need to do the same. We recommend that you actually get in before them and leave after them.

If you ask your team to work over the weekend, you should either be there in the office to support them or at least pop into the office over the weekend to check on progress and show support. Remember if you are not in with your team and they have a critical problem all work will stop and the extra work you have planned will not happen, plus morale will be low due to the team losing their weekend and not getting the work done.

Cause: You are not mucking in.

Action: You don't have to be a techie to offer to help out. If your team is struggling offer to help out; even if it's just getting the tea and snacks.

13.14 Scope and responsibility of your project is unclear

Problem Description: You are not sure where your bit starts and ends; you are not sure which bits you are responsible for.

Summary: You are given the work to do, but with no clear scope, guidelines or idea of what is your responsibility and that of others.

Causes & Recommended Action:

Cause: You have not read your Terms of Reference (ToR) or you do not have one.

Action: Review your Terms of Reference and revise as required, then obtain sign-off for the changes. If you don't have a ToR then draft one and put it out for review and sign off. (see *appendix G ToR Template*)