



This paper is designed to highlight the signs of “just good enough” project management, and the results of this approach. The following are five signs that you might be experiencing “good enough” project management.

Consultants are usually called upon to help companies address their most pressing business issues. Typically, these issues require specialized skills, advanced problem solving processes and unique expertise. Project management consulting is no different. When critical projects simply cannot afford to fail, executives turn to high end project management consulting firms like PMAlliance to develop accurate project plans and implement the rigorous control processes they need to be successful. But, what happens when the projects in question are not “mission critical”, or there is not an extreme sense of urgency? Do the same aggressive mediation processes apply? Sadly, in many cases, a sense of “just good enough” applies to those projects lacking constant executive attention. “Just good enough” is a problem. It plagues the inner workings of a business culture because team members, project managers and executive stakeholders get lulled into a state where mediocre is acceptable.

#### LACKING DIRECTION FROM DISENGAGED SPONSORS

Lacking appropriate direction on a project is typically the result of two common occurrences: sponsors not being as engaged as they should be to communicate management’s expectations or a project manager not being clear on what goals to drive the project towards. What often results is a project team that successfully completes the wrong project or a directionally correct project that misses its target dates. Not beginning your project with a coordinated launch that aligns executive expectations with the intended strategies of the team, enables the most well intentioned projects to drift off course. Sometimes just having a project plan at all is “just good enough”, but ensuring you have a plan driving towards stakeholder’s expectations is another topic completely. How aligned are your stakeholders with each other, with the project manager and with project team members?

#### POOR COMMUNICATION STAGNATES RESPONSE TIME

Consistent and standardized communications with good diction is at the core of ensuring that executive stakeholders are up to date on the projects’ progress. Project memos that are poorly written often do not get their point across, and management disregards the communication altogether. Project managers who provide infrequent reporting fail to maintain continuity between the team and upper management. Stakeholders not only need to be updated on the positive accomplishments of a project, but more importantly they need to be kept up to speed on potential obstacles that may turn into show stoppers. Without accurate information being reported regularly management will be unable to effectively respond to emergencies. Reports that are poorly formatted, infrequently distributed and utilizing unprofessional grammar showcase the fact that the reporter is doing just enough to “check the box” that a memo was sent out. When a project is not supported with standardized, quality status reports, “just good enough” is in effect.

**TOLERATING MISSED OBLIGATIONS**

When missed obligations and project commitments are tolerated, the underlying message being communicated is "it doesn't really matter" if we are on-time or not. Consequently, if it "doesn't really matter" whether the project is on-time, then rarely (if ever) will the team work on establishing a strategy for regaining the time lost. When milestones are either showing behind schedule, or constantly being missed without management intervention, there is a perception that missing obligations is OK. By not taking urgent corrective actions to compress schedules to be within their deadlines, a culture lacking accountability is being enabled. When evidence is presented to a stakeholder that clearly illustrates a need to alter strategies or implement a course change, and nothing happens, tolerance for delays is apparent. If your project is behind schedule, and you are not making adjustments to your project plan, "just good enough" is happening.

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**INCOMPLETE PROJECT PLAN TELLING HALF THE STORY**

The core of a project team's ability to make good informed business decisions is a well structured, comprehensive project plan. When the project schedule is incomplete or out of date, the resulting business decisions will not be accurate or timely. The project schedule not only needs to reflect the current state of the project, but also the project in its entirety; not just a portion of the project work. Project plans that are "just good enough" appear to be detailed and complete on the surface, however upon further review it is common to find these projects are only capturing a portion of the entire plan, they are planned in independent silos instead of being cross-functionally integrated. When these "just good enough" project plans exist, it is nearly impossible to see how movement in today's activities may impact key milestones further downstream. In essence, what appears to be a project plan, is no more useful than a task list of action items. Which one do you have?

**TOLERATING MISSED OBLIGATIONS**

In a 2008 study, IndustryWeek Magazine reported that corporate America wasted an estimated \$37B annually on unproductive meetings. There were many factors that went into this dollar figure, however, at its core was conducting meetings without a confirmed agenda and not providing value added information to the meeting participants. Unproductive or poorly ran meetings not only are financially costly to organizations, but they erode our most valuable resource: time. A few characteristics of non-value added meetings are: the timeliness of the information you are reviewing, how frequent are your meetings, and how long you are requiring your audience to attend. Are you discussing and analyzing fresh, real-time data or are you reviewing data that is weeks old? Is your team meeting every two or three weeks to discuss their project, or are you meeting on a weekly cadence? Are you holding one or two hour meetings with fluctuating participation? When "just good enough" meetings are occurring to satisfy stakeholders your ability to implement corrective actions in a timely manner has evaporated. When was the last time your team met?

When management enables a culture where it is OK to do just enough to get by, project performance suffers, project costs are not contained, and team member morale is damaged. Not taking the time to continuously pursue improvements allows mediocrity to creep in, moderate quality to become commonplace, and 'ordinary' becomes the way of doing business. Ensuring that rigorous project management processes are adhered to and improved upon, is what separates the high performing project teams from the mediocre ones.

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