

Who Killed Project Management?

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**Who Killed Project Management?
A Baker's Dozen of Project Management Do's and Don'ts
Rebecca Staton-Reinstein, Ph.D.**

Being a Project Manager is not for the faint of heart. If you don't enjoy nearly impossible challenges, lots of criticism, the ground constantly shifting under your feet, and contradictory demands from powerful people, consider another way to make a living.

When downsizing/re-sizing/right-sizing became the norm, companies eliminated whole departments of folks who took care of all sorts of important work. The work still needed doing and outsourcing/off-shoring/on-shoring/in-sourcing didn't always work.

What to do? Turn everything into a project! Assign someone to be in charge and call the person a project manager. It didn't matter what the person's position on the org chart was or whether he or she had any training or experience; just assign the project.

Needless to say, lots of projects took a nose dive. Even with all the information available today, sophisticated project management tools, and organizations, conferences, and books dedicated to project management, many projects and project managers still fail.

It doesn't have to be that way. We just have to use the knowledge that's out there.

What is a project anyway? The late Joseph Juran, a founder of the modern quality movement, provided a great definition. *A project is a problem scheduled for solution.* What's a problem? A gap between what we have and what we want or need.

Over the years we've discovered some basic, critical *DOs and DON'Ts* to focus on while using established project management processes, techniques, and tools.

A Baker's Dozen Project Management DOs and DON'Ts

DOs	DON'Ts
DO develop a Business Problem statement to focus <i>every</i> project.	DON'T assume the requester has thought about the business problem.
DO find out where the project fits in the organization's strategic plan.	DON'T jump into the project without knowing which goal(s) it addresses.
DO have a sponsor and develop a strong relationship to navigate difficulties.	DON'T proceed without a sponsor or ignore the relationship.
DO manage the project as a process with formal written directions	DON'T try to manage even small projects without a fully defined, written process.
DO fully define results-information/service/product and the fit in the customer's world.	DON'T go ahead until you understand the customer's full requirements and operation.
DO PLAN! Use systematic techniques to develop the project plan, even for small projects. Assume things will change.	DON'T treat <i>plan</i> as a four-letter word. Remember: Fail To Plan; Plan To Fail. Don't forget to re-plan when things change.
DO treat stakeholders, customers, suppliers, and sponsors as partners to solve a business problem.	DON'T treat anyone as an adversary or he or she will become one and add more risk to the project.

DOs	DON'Ts
DO analyze risk factors. Plan to prevent risk when you can or respond with a contingency plan when you can't.	DON'T ignore risk planning. Hope is not a strategy. What can go wrong will go wrong.
DO develop your management skills.	DON'T ignore the <i>management</i> in project management, especially your people skills
DO develop your leadership skills.	DON'T shrink from <i>leading</i> with clear direction, motivation, and determination.
DO develop a communication plan and communicate, communicate, communicate relentlessly with everyone.	DON'T assume anyone knows anything or neglect keeping everyone in the loop.
DO use software project management tools on large projects or to manage multiple projects efficiently.	DON'T assume knowing how to use a software project management tool is the same as knowing how to manage a project.
DO elicit Lessons Learned at every review, checkpoint, milestone, or other meeting AND integrate them into this and future projects systematically.	DON'T wait until project ends for feedback or ignore feedback you don't like. If you fail to improve your project management process, future projects will fail.

Whether your project is producing the annual department meeting, building a stretch of the Interstate, or creating software for the next Mars rover, the fundamental rules of good project management always apply. Ignore them at your peril. Of all the project management *DOs and DON'Ts*, the most important are: (1) Fully define the business problem to focus your planning, (2) Manage, lead, and communicate extraordinarily, and (3) Learn from everything you do and plow it back into your next project. Keep closing the gap on your own project management performance.

So who killed project management? We did. And we continue to do so every time we choose *not* to BE great project managers.

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©Rebecca Staton-Reinstein, Ph.D., president of Advantage Leadership, Inc., has managed projects in medical research, genetics, information technology, education, process improvement, organizational development, and other fields. She works with companies around the world who are ready to improve their project management to get better results and integrate these practices into their strategic leadership, planning, and development initiatives to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

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