

Managing Project Risk

Overview

This chapter aligns with chapter 11 of the PMBOK and 11% of the CAPM questions come from this knowledge area. The content connects to the Planning and Monitoring & Controlling category of the PMP questions.

All projects, including those within instructional design, rarely, if ever, go completely according to plan. Thus, competent project managers are prepared to deal with unexpected adversity during the course of the project. In order to mitigate the impact of disruptions, project managers must identify the potential risks and make appropriate plans. Failure to do so can easily lead to a decrease in project quality or unnecessary increases in budget.

Designers Share Their Experiences

Dr. Andy Gibbons – Instructional Psychology and Technology – BYU



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At the beginning of this project we were training helicopter pilots, we were training sensor operators who sit at the back and operate electronic equipment. What was the biggest threat? It was probably me and my naivety. I was the project director of a project that eventually accumulated twenty-five staff members, and we were working with Navy teams of subject matter experts. We probably had eight or nine subject matter experts assigned to our project. That was a rich, rich resource. And I had no idea, I'd not been trained how to manage a project that size. My previous project experience had been a staff of four people at most: a secretary, an artist and a writer, and myself. Well this project was a different kind of challenge. The biggest risk was me not understanding, and as a result, there were some big mistakes made. I would say that as far as designer's secrets, that I should have known that I didn't know, it would be how subject matter experts, excuse me, how bodies of subject matter are organized. And how, as a designer, you have to be able to get to the heart of the subject matter quickly and efficiently, sometimes even before the subject matter expert is there. I'll tell you about another project. I was working on a project with DC-10 pilots, for a major airline. And we were doing a task analysis. Tried to identify all the tasks that these pilots had to be able to perform. We got to the part where we were talking about emergencies that they had to be able to perform. And we were listing emergencies that happened in the pilot's handbook. And I was all the time going through trying to make sure, are we leaving anything out? Is there anything that could go wrong with this aircraft that a pilot would have to be able to respond to, that needs to go into this task analysis? And they said, well no. I said, well okay, hydraulic systems, your aircraft's got two hydraulic systems. And they said, yeah. And I said, well what if both hydraulic systems,

we've got a single hydraulic system failure here, and you got a procedure that the pilot has to learn for that. What about if you have a dual hydraulic system failure? What if both of them go out at the same time? Oh it never happens. If one of them goes out, the second one kicks in, it automatically turns itself on, you don't have to do anything. I said, hasn't there been any instance or isn't there some possibility of that happening. No, no, no. So we left it out of the task analysis. Not nine months later there was a DC-10 flying over Saint Louis somewhere in the region, mid U.S., and a private plane clipped off its tail. And both hydraulic systems failed. And there were three hundred people on board. Now, a quick thinking pilot figured out a way, I mean what happens when a hydraulic system fails on a major airliner, you can't control the aircraft, you can't turn it, you can't bank it you can't do anything. So how did they land that aircraft, they finally did land the aircraft, it was a crash landing, but it was a landing, and half of the people on board survived, so 150 people survived that crash landing in a cornfield. How did the pilot figure out how to handle that emergency? Well, they used the jet throttles. They would adjust it this way if they wanted to turn this way, they would adjust it this way if they wanted to turn this way. And so they were able to land the aircraft where they wanted to. And of course, they did altitude control just by denying gas to the engines. So they brought it down and a hundred and fifty people were saved, that otherwise would have died. But I always remembered that one time when I had the instinct to say I think I know your subject matter better than you do, and I think this is something that could happen. This is a task that you ought to include in your training. I'll just bet you it's in the training now. And so, you have to, as an instructional designer, you can't just be naive. You can't just accept what they tell you. You've got to question everything. You've got to become a big critic.

Heather Bryce – Independent Studies – BYU



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I didn't know how expensive Art 45 was going to be. And I hate bringing that up over and over again, because honestly it was the only drawback of this project. Everything else went so well. That was probably a risk. Fortunately, you know, we had the funds to be able to pay for that. But some places, you know, you don't have the funds. If you run out of money, you are not able to finish your project. So that was probably a huge risk to this project. But other than that, there weren't really any risks. I mean I suppose there could have been conflict between the artist's opinions of what you should do when you have several artists working on different projects. But we just really didn't have that.

Dr. Larry Seawright – Center for Teaching and Learning – BYU



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Probably in building the learning management system, that we call the BYU Learning Suite, the biggest risk that we had was the short beta test period that we're going to have. Had we known that up front I think we would have compressed some of our development cycle sooner so that we have a little bit more of a beta test period.

Defining Risk

Risk Management Process

Project Risk by Phases

Project Risk and the Project Complexity Profile





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