

More Simple Project Management Terms (Volume 3)

This is my third column describing basic project management terms. I will one day place all of these in a dorktionary for my loyal readers. Maybe I could make one million dollars. You get all of this knowledge for free – for now anyway.

Assumption – These are bad things that you assume will not happen. If you call these items “assumptions” you can just pretend they will not happen and go about managing your project. If the problems occur, you can refer back to your assumptions as the reason you did not manage the problems. In essence they are a “do-over”. I love assumptions! They are a project manager’s best friend.

Activity – Activities are pieces of work that go on your schedule. You can make these activities at a high-level such as “Build the Bridge” or very detailed like “Go to the bathroom at 10:00”. The project manager decides at what level you want to manage the project depending on how interested you are in the work. For instance, if you are not so motivated you could assign an activity that says “Construct the Building” and give a due date for 18 months from now. Then you can focus on more interesting matters and come back in 18 months to see if the work is completed or not. On the other hand if you don’t trust the people that work on the team you can manage them on an hourly basis.

Constraints – Constraints are limitations that are outside the control of the project team and need to be managed around. These constraints limit your ability to proceed as you like. It is sort of a fuzzy term and can be used to your advantage when you are in a pinch. For instance, once my project missed a key milestone date. I simply replied that there were some project constraints that limited my ability to hit the date. Since I am the greatest project manager in the world, no one challenged me. In fact, I am not sure anyone else knows what a constraint was. Even I don’t know for sure.

Functional Manager – Simply put - the functional manager is the jerk that you report to in your organization. The rule of thumb is that everyone’s manager is a jerk, but the manager two levels up is a good guy. The senior managers are grandfatherly figures that everyone likes. If the senior managers need to lay off some staff, the decision gets pushed down to the lowest level manager to execute. That way the executive team can speak kind words while your boss fires you. It is no wonder he is such a jerk. He fires people when the executive team is saying soothing messages.

Milestone - A milestone is a scheduling event that signifies the completion of a major deliverable or a set of related deliverables. It is called a milestone because it can be a mile between each of the milestone events. By the way, I am not sure how any barbarians outside of the USA understand this term "miles". I understand it refers to the distance from the start of a kilometer until the end. However, I am not sure. In any case, sprinkle milestones into your project every month or two. They give you extra reasons to celebrate and have parties.

Requirements – Requirements are descriptions of how a product or service should act, appear or perform. We have another term in Putympkin for requirements. We call them “Gy^fr>”. Roughly translated this means “they stuff the customer wants you to do”. There is a process to gathering requirements, but on my projects the project team knows better anyway. We simply build what we think the customer wants. It is much quicker

this way. When we are done we can always make changes as Phase 2 and Phase 3. By the way, this also helps the employment of project managers. We never run out of work.

Schedule – Some people in the United Kingdom call this a “shedule”. I don’t get it. In our country we call this the “skidule”. The schedule is the list of activities that must be completed, the relationship between the activities, the people assigned, the person to be blamed if the work is late, and more. See “activity” for more information on whether to make the scheduled very detailed or very high-level. Some cretins call the schedule a project plan but this is not correct. The “schedule” is the “shedule” is the “skidule”.

Stakeholder - These people have an interest (a stake) in the outcome of the project. Not everyone understands this so I like to joke that these people must buy the project manager a steak dinner. It has worked successfully on a couple occasions. You should all try it.

Steering Committee - A Steering Committee is usually a group of high-level stakeholders that are responsible for providing guidance on overall strategic direction. They generally are responsible for steering the project in the wrong direction. I like to set up such a group so that they can be blamed when the project gets in political problems. No one likes to be on a Steering Committee in my company.

Template - Templates are pre-existing forms that include standard text and spaces to fill-in-the-blanks with standard information. In our organization we use templates as the starting point for changes. This allows us to show our creativity since we are still politically repressed. We now have different project documents that have some similarity to each other but are all different.

Do any readers have other terms they would like to have defined in the project management dorktionary? Send them on in to your friend Samoht at Sam@TenStep.com.