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What to do if you are behind schedule
by Yury Shkoda
Advisory Article

What to do if you are behind schedule [1]

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When you are managing a project, you do your best to complete it within budget and on schedule. However, sometimes things turn in a different direction and suddenly you realize that you are behind schedule. A project manager myself, I know that it's not the best discovery and the first time it happens to you, you panic.

The thing is, it's important to focus and remember that there are different strategies how a project manager can deal with this problem. Actually, there are two ways a project manager can compress the schedule: fast-tracking and crashing. Each of them has its advantages and disadvantages. The project manager has to assess the situation and choose what's best for each particular case.

What I learned from my personal experience is that crashing should be used as a last resort, when other options have been considered first. Crashing is a technique when resources are added to the project. One of the biggest disadvantages of crashing is that it will have effect on costs. Obviously, if you involve additional people to finish the project, you will have additional costs. Also, additional team members will considerably increase the number of communication channels. Crashing may have unexpected change of events in case the new resources are not familiar with the subject. The additional resources might be over-qualified and this would lead to conflicts within the team.

Fast-tracking has its own flaws that must be taken into account when choosing the most appropriate compression technique for the project. This technique means performing the activities in parallel, when they were originally planned to be performed one after the other. It doesn't involve any costs; however, it increases risks because activities now being performed in parallel may lead to rework or rearrangement of the project. And, reworking can lead to even more time loss.

Even though, as I said, I would first consider using fast-tracking, I can give you a real example of when crashing was a better option for my project.

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I am a project manager in the IT industry. Some time ago I was managing a project to create a website for a ventilation company. There was a strict deadline and we were behind schedule. Normally, I would turn to fast-tracking, however, due to some circumstances I decided to crash the project. My team was still working on some issues with design. We didn't even start working on some features like live chat and reviews section. There was another team that had just finished working on another project and I knew that they implemented live chat feature to their project. It occurred to me, that if I involve a few members from that team to work solely on the live chat, we won't lose time introducing them to the whole project. Also, if they will be working only on this feature, they can do it from their office and it will help us avoid extra communication channels.

We had three additional developers involved who worked solely on the live chat feature. Meanwhile, my team resolved all the issues with design and had just enough time to implement the rest of the functions to the website. We completed the project on time and the client was extremely happy with his website.

My personal experience shows that choosing a technique for project compression will mostly depend on the circumstances of each particular project. The most important part is to be able to analyze the situation and use the best option. That's the responsibility of any project manager.

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