



# Troubleshooting Issues on Your Project

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What you'll come to realize during your journey as a project manager is that no matter how skilled and experienced you are, things can always go wrong. Sometimes they'll be minor issues that are easily resolvable, and sometimes they'll completely change the course of the project and create untold amounts of stress.

As a project manager, the ability to recognize and subsequently troubleshoot these problems is essential. It is your job to be flexible and adaptable because when an issue arises, the team will always look to you for guidance, and the stakeholders will look to you for reassurance that the project will still move forward.

It's a lot of pressure, but you have to be prepared for it because it *will* happen to you at some point. You will deal with a major issue during a project on multiple occasions throughout your career and will likely deal with some minor issues on every single project. Expecting otherwise is a recipe for disaster.

One thing to keep in mind is that many potential issues will arise because there are so many moving parts in a single project. Projects are complex because a critical aim is being worked for, increasing the overall risk. In an article for *Wrike*, Maria Waida outlined the common pitfalls and said:

*The most common project management issues tend to revolve around communication, organization, and tool functionality. When there are too many moving parts in an initiative, communication can break down, information can become lost or*

*confusing, and project management issues can arise at every level.*

You should be consolidating things like communication, organization, and tool functionality while managing a project. Part of that is ensuring they can be controlled when problems arise around them.

Let's discuss these issues and how best to deal with them:

Firstly, an issue that could plague the project immensely right from the outset: a lack of clear goals. This can be a communication and an organizational problem that can worm its way into the project from any level. Even if you believe you have a clear set of goals for every project stage, they can get lost in translation among the team or may have been developed without the right mindset entirely.

When writing for HBR in 2003, Nadim Matta and Ron Ashkenas explained it like this:

*The traditional approach to project management shifts the teams focus away from the end result towards developing recommendations, new technologies, and partial solutions. The intent, of course, is to piece together a blueprint to achieve the ultimate goal, but when a project involves many people working over an extended period of time, it's very hard for managers planning it to predict all the activities and work streams that will be needed.*

To fix this problem, you need to drill the importance of that end result into the team. When drafting a list of goals and deadlines, ensure that they are all focused on pushing towards the finish line and clarify the relevance of each individual goal with the team.

Suppose the project was planning a wedding. Your goals would center around the venue, the guest list, the ceremony, and the meal, to name just a few. Each of these is separate, but they are all necessary to serve the end result, which means that the intentions for each one have to be equally clarified.

Leaving things unsaid or assuming that the team will know exactly what you want will result in partial solutions or attempts at new solutions mentioned in the HBR study. So to ensure clarity on all fronts, every aspect of the project should be defined by a SMART goal. That stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable

- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

As Kate Boogaard described it in an article for *Atlassian*, setting SMART goals:

*eliminates generalities and guesswork, sets a clear timeline, and makes it easier to track progress and identify missed milestones.*

If you face an issue resulting from unclear goals, you can use this method to get your team back on track. It will clear up any uncertainty surrounding individual goals.

You might also find yourself faced with scheduling issues that need dealing with. Numerous things could put you behind schedule:

- the project may not start on time
- there may be a shortage of resources necessary to move forward,
- your team could undergo an unforeseen reshuffling

There are countless possibilities here. The real question is what to do about it when it happens.

The best course of action is to try and reallocate resources and staffing to the elements of the project that require greater attention. You may have evenly spread your team out across the project to ensure every aspect of it gets seen with equal focus, but you may need to give that up in favor of pushing through the most challenging tasks with greater speed.

In Tom Mochal's weekly advice column for TechRepublic, he said this:

*If the project is trending over deadline, by definition it is the critical path that's late. Once you understand the critical path, see if resources can be moved from other activities to help resolve the issue. This will allow you to get the project back on track by delaying or stretching out some work.*

'The Critical Path' here refers to the chain of linked tasks directly affecting the project's delivery date. Moving things around in service of that does delay or stretch some work, as Mochal says, which will be stressful for the team. It will require an unexpected shift in responsibilities for some of them. For others, it may require them to take on more work on a specific task now that others have been moved to more urgent tasks. But in the long run, it will be worth it.

Something you can never really predict is how the clients and stakeholders will react to the project. Their satisfaction is what you are working towards, which can sometimes get lost when you're so focused on finishing the actual work. So client dissatisfaction is one of the issues that you might face as a project manager, and you have to know how to deal with it.

It will make it so much easier for you to maintain client satisfaction if you keep them in the loop from day one. That way, you can deal with their issues as the project is happening instead of having to go back and change things you thought you had finished.

In an article for Forbes, Matt Doyle made this observation:

*Keeping clients in the loop can be stressful. They don't always know how to interpret changes in timing or the order of operations and it can lead to inefficient demands. However, I've found keeping clients in the dark can lead to more problems. Keeping clients in the loop shows that you value them. It communicates trust and reduces the impact when problems do need to be announced.*

So if you can build a consistent relationship with the client from the very beginning of the project, then they will feel like they can trust you with it and will feel confident communicating changes. And you will feel more confident when fixing their problems. In terms of how to resolve the issues, you have to make sure that you design projects so that they can be modified from the beginning.

Having the client give input all the way through will often lead to more requests for modifications, and this way, you will be prepared for that. Get as much information about the issues from the client as you can so that you can fully understand what they want you to change. And make it clear that you intend to deal with the problem as quickly as possible.

As Kurt Schmidt for the publication *Project Manager* said:

*When you display a sense of urgency your stock will immediately rise and the chances your project will succeed will follow in turn.*

It's also worth communicating several solutions to the client to give them options. This will increase your chances of a smooth resolution while also proving that you are serious about fixing things.

To sum this up, most of the issues you will face with a project will be rooted in communication problems with both the team and the clients. You will deal with unclear goals, scheduling problems, and unhappy clients, which are risks you need to be prepared for.

You should take from this that while communication is typically the root of project issues, it will also be the solution. If you can learn how to deal with major issues by communicating with the team and the clients, then troubleshooting your project issues will be much easier.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

### **Reading List:**

**[Article]** Common Project Management Issues You Can Solve With the Right Tools, Maria Waida

**[Article]** Why Good Projects Fail Anyway, Nadim Matta & Ron Ashkenas

**[Article]** How to Write SMART Goals, Kate Boogaard

**[Article]** Apply These Techniques to Get Your Project Back on Schedule, Tom Mochal

**[Article]** How to Maintain Client Relationships During Long Projects, Matt Doyle

**[Article]** How to Handle an Unhappy Client, Kurt Schmidt