



Mitigating Fixed Date #Project Risks

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#ProjectManagement #AskTheExperts

I was recently asked the following question:

“Fixed date projects can be found in every industry and they can be very challenging. Being handed a date for project delivery on a plate with no discussion is not the best way to manage project schedules; what challenges and risks should I be mindful of when dealing with a fixed date project?”

This is a great question, and the setting of arbitrary fixed project dates appears to be the trend lately. Here are things you can do to reduce the risk for the project, or at least reduce some headaches for you:

1. If you have not done so already, document each and every risk and issue that you are aware of right now. (also do this during the course of the project)
2. If you have any other team members assigned to the project so far, interview them. Describe the project to them, and without sharing your feelings, elicit their thoughts about the project. Obtain an unbiased reaction to the project from each member currently assigned.
3. Share your documented risks and issues with your project sponsors/leadership. Do not wait to present a large formal document such as a Project Charter yet. We are in agile times; treat your project artifacts the same way and share them with team members as they are developed.
4. Provide estimates early and often. Work with your team members to provide regular estimates, since the more you spend time on the project the more you will learn, and the more you will uncover additional requirements, issues, risks, assumptions, etc.
5. Identify, document and present your resource management plan as best as you can with the information you have. Identify and document the roles needed, when they are needed, including the skill sets necessary.
6. Resource questions to answer include:
 - How many resources will you really be assigned?
 - Of the resources being assigned - are they the correct role, and do they have the skill set and talent to be on your project team?



- Are the resources being assigned excited to be on the team? If any of your team members do not have the talent you need, or do not have the passion and drive that is necessary to be on the team – this is a very big risk that needs to be documented and mitigated.
7. Develop a complete understanding of the scope of the project. Once the scope is identified and agreed to, you can understand requirements, and then can give an estimate of time. If the estimated time needed does not match the fixed date, then some scope may need to be reduced.
 8. Become great friends with your Business Analyst (BA) – a great BA can identify what is needed, why it is needed and document the behavior of the product you are designing. This is critical to get buy-in on why the project is being pursued and especially critical during the beginning stages of the project to verify your scope and estimates.
 9. Don't "cry wolf". Raise critical issues and risks that are truly critical. Your project may not be as important as other critical projects within the organization. While you may have many issues and risks to deal with for this project – if every time you raise an issue or risk to management and you deem it as critical (and it is really not), you lose your credibility and management will not believe you, even if they need to.
 10. Finally – stay positive. Meet expectations. Communicate often. Let the entire team know what is going on, and keep them motivated. Have fun!