

Assumptions: The Challenge of Every Project Manager

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The Challenge

Recognizing Assumptions

Seeking Truth

Exposing Faulty Assumptions

Making Sound Decisions

Assumption: The Definition

Premise: a statement that is assumed to be true and from which a conclusion can be drawn*

A hypothesis that is taken for granted*

* [Wordnetweb.princeton.edu](http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu)

Assumption: The Definition

Something taken for granted or accepted as true without proof; a supposition: a valid assumption**

A supposition on the current situation or a presupposition on the future course of events, either or both assumed to be true in the absence of positive proof, necessary to enable the [PM] in the process of planning to complete an estimate of the situation and make a decision on the course of action.**

Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. US Department of Defense 2005

** The Free Dictionary

PMBOK 4th Edition

“Assumptions are factors that, for planning purposes, are considered to be true, real, or certain without proof or demonstration.”

Assumptions are addressed in...

Governance – the beginning of a phase is also a time to revalidate earlier assumptions

Scope Management – requirements assumptions and constraints

Time Management – activity assumptions, resource assumptions

Cost Management – assumptions on direct or indirect costs used in estimates

Risk Management – assumptions analysis explores validity as applied to the project

Procurement Management – assumptions that could affect planned procurements

Recognizing Assumptions

When in the project process do you make assumptions?

Assumptions are made...

- ...in planning
- ...in executing
- ...in monitoring
- ...in changing
- ...in closing
- ...in reporting
- ...in managing

...in everything you do as a project manager

The trouble is...

...recognizing the assumptions being made by you, the project manager, and your project team, stakeholders, customers, and anyone else involved with your project

The First Great Assumption

Accepting the Project:

Scope

Schedule

Budget

Risk

The Second Great Assumption

Project Resources:

Skills / Capabilities

Knowledge / Tools

Motivation / Value

Availability

The Third Great Assumption

Terms and Definitions:

Common Usage

Differing Context

Implied Meaning

Seeking Truth

Why do I believe the assumption is true?

What is the basis of the belief?

Is the basis proven?

How can the belief be tested?

Exposing Faulty Assumptions

Seek additional information

Identify factual data

Determine when the assumption can be tested

Understand the basis of the assumption

Making Sound Decisions

About half of all business decisions end in failure

The failed decisions share three common blunders:

Managers rush to judgment

Misuse their resources

Repeatedly employ failure-prone tactics to make decisions

Source: USA Today, "Poor Decisionmaking is Commonplace – Corporations" December 2002
(Paul Nutt, professor of management, Ohio State University, Columbus, author of Why Decisions Fail: Avoiding the Blunders and Traps That Lead to Debacles)

Making Sound Decisions

Understand the assumptions being made

Determine the impact

Mitigate the assumptions

Know the Probabilities and Risks

Reality Check

We make assumptions in order to predict an outcome given a particular situation

We hope we are correct but we worry about the outcome

When the worst happens, we blame someone else

And when all else fails, we move on

Final Thought

Assume nothing.

When we assume, you know what happens...



