

## Simple Project Management Terms You Need to Know

In past columns I explained some basic project management terms for people that don't understand what they are doing. Explaining simple project management terms to dummies is one of the reasons I am such an effective coach. (Oh sorry, if you don't like that I referred to you as "dummies", perhaps you would prefer "moron" instead.)

Here are some additional terms that are important for project managers to know and understand. In the future perhaps I will compile all of this in a "dorktionary" for project managers.

**Action Item.** This is a way to capture assignments for other people. As the project manager, you should ensure that by the time a meeting is over, the participants all have work assigned. If you are savvy, much of this work will be activities that you were responsible for. A good project manager delegates as much work as possible to allow you to manage at a high-level, and keep any personal overtime work to an absolute minimum.

**Agile Development.** In the past, projects that were chaotic and out of control were referred to as disasters. Now the savvy project manager simply refers to them as "Agile". Agile development allows project teams to get away with all of the bad habits from the past 50 years. However, with Agile, these are all seen as good techniques now. "Agile" is actually Latin for "let the programmers do whatever they want".

**Charter.** This is the document that is used to provide all of the upfront excuses and caveats to protect you when the project starts to go bad. If you don't do a very good job chartering the project you might actually be held accountable for results. A good charter has adequate budget, schedule and resources, but is very non-committal on exactly what the client will receive. This provides job security for you and your team, while not committing you to anything that will be held against you during the project.

**Critical Path.** There are many paths that a project manager can take, but the critical path is the shortest distance from your office to your home. There is nothing more critical than getting home as fast as possible. This term is also used in project management to refer to the longest set of activities from the present time to the next major problem. Good project managers seem like they can always keep major trouble in the distance long enough for to be re-assigned

**Issue.** This is a problem that pops up that you don't know how to address. If you refer to it as an "issue" than other people can help you resolve it. In fact, if you play your cards right, you can get other people to solve all of your problems. That is the kind of executive delegation that I am famous for.

**Portfolio.** Most sane people will tell you that this is a notebook that includes all of your important papers. However, some pencil-necked braniac also decided that it can refer to the collection of work that is going on at any given time. You should make your portfolio seem as big as possible so that it looks like you are responsible for a lot of work. For example, you could state in a meeting "wow you should look at all the work we are doing in the portfolio". It sounds big, but since managers don't generally understand the world, you will rarely receive any questions on what exactly the portfolio is.

**Portfolio Manager.** This is a similar title to the cool Program Manager, but it is even cooler. If you are a Portfolio Manager you could say “Hey look at me. I am cooler and better than project managers and program managers!”

**Risks.** Every project manager knows that things happen that were not expected. These problems used to be a problem for the project managers, but now you have a built-in excuse. You can identify them as risks. If you identify them as risks, you are excused for blame if the risk event actually comes true. You can state “this is not unexpected. We identified this early on as a risk”. Your boss will say he understands and he appreciates you trying.

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](mailto:Sam@TenStep.com).