Gathering Metrics on Projects

Question:

My company is stressing that we need to start collecting more date on the status of our projects. Which metrics do you feel are most important on projects?

Abdul

Answer:

Abdul,

I like your question – it is short. You might not think I gather many metrics on my projects. Actually I do. It is the best way to protect myself from the incompetent bozos that work on my project. I already have an idea of the areas that I think will cause the most trouble on my project. I use this information to collect data. Here are a couple examples.

- **Issues.** I know that there will be a lot of issues on this project. So, I not only track the issues, but I also track the cost to the project in terms of schedule and budget. I also capture one additional piece of important information - the person that caused the problem. It is okay if it was a group effort. I will document all of the players. At the end of the quarter I issue a report that shows each person, the number of problems they caused and the number of extra hours required to fix their screw-ups. As you can imagine, this is very helpful information when the project trends late or overbudget.

- **Celebrations.** I keep track of the number of team and client celebrations, as well as the cost. I also keep track of the number of people that attend and the number of hours that are spent in celebrations. This information comes in handy two ways. If my boss says that morale is bad I show him the metrics on celebrations to show that I have tried to keep morale high. If the project is trending overbudget and behind schedule, I also have these numbers to show how much my team is slacking off. This is a good example of a dual purpose metrics. I think you Americans say it is "breaking two stones with one bird".

- **Comp days.** We sometimes have to work a lot of overtime on this project. (When I say "we" I mean the team members.) Sometimes I see my team working up to five hours extra per week! Of course, they don't expect to work extra for nothing, so I give them time off later. I track all of this. It is another dual purpose metric. If I am questioned by the lazy Human Resource staff, I can show that I have provided equivalent time off. When the project is late I also show how we have reduced staffing based on people taking comp days.

That's about it. You might ask why I don't track schedule and budget. In my opinion it is a fool's game. My experience is that the project will cost what it costs and it will take the time it will take. Yes, I keep cursory track of the costs and duration. But if you track these numbers too closely in my company you will only open yourself up to many questions. I don't mind the questions. I have the metrics to answer the questions (see above). But really, why go out of your way to bring the scrutiny on to your project.

When my managers see me trending badly they will certainly bring it to your attention. After all that is why they get paid the big krushski's.