

Recognising Project Warning Signs Part 1

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We see warning signs every day, such as "Wet paint" or "Road Ends in Water." Such signs are common reminders to be careful. The earlier we heed their advice, the better off we'll be because time is a resource when it comes to dealing with warning signs. For example, when asked to identify the telltale signs of heart trouble, most people will list numbness in the left arm or pains in the chest. Although these are some classic symptoms of heart trouble, once they occur it is often too late. People need to look at early warning signs, such as high blood pressure or higher cholesterol levels. These early warning signs provide us with the gift of time to change our behaviour to affect our future.

Recognising Early Project Warning Signs

Many people believe that the first sign of trouble with a project is scope change. Usually by the time the scope has changed, the project has already slid down the slippery slope of scope creep. The first sign of scope problems really occurs when:

- Requirements have not been well defined.
- Project stakeholders have not been interviewed.
- The project has no business case.

Warning signs are about the future. The sooner we know about the future, the more time we have to change it. However, project managers and organisations can't see into the future. The best way to "predict" the future of a project is to estimate what problems the current project might encounter based on past, similar projects. It's not foolproof, but it's certainly better than adding a fortune teller to your project team.

Project Health Checks — Five Categories of Warning Signs

My favourite name for the activity of finding out if a project is on track is the project health check. This increasingly popular and proven approach includes three main activities:

- Looking for warning signs
- Conducting the "exam"
- Using the results

Most people have more than enough information on project warning signs to create a long list.

However, it's not the quantity of the items on the list, it's the quality of the list that makes the difference. The best list of warning signs is one developed especially for your unique project, organisation and customer. In my next article you will find a list of five broad categories of warning signs to help you get started on creating your own list. These five categories have proved to be common for organisations that are successful in using health checks to ferret out problems.



Find out how ESI International can help your organisation.

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