Project Management AntiPatterns

SWEN 256 – Software Process & Project Management

Definitions

- Design Pattern
  - A general solution to a common problem
  - Can and should be reused
  - Are best practices
- Project Management Antipatterns
  - A commonly used pattern
  - Used in social situations, business operations, or Software Engineering
  - Ineffective or counterproductive
  - Can reside in any dimension, but today we are focusing on the People dimension (Classic Mistakes)

Blowhard Jamboree

Problem:

Opinions, misinformation, or bias of (so-called) experts bias important decisions. Opinions or misinformation are often touted as facts.

Solution:

Be honest about why you have an opinion. If evidence to support that opinion is not immediately obvious, spend more time analyzing the problem and potential solutions. Avoid sources of misinformation.

Analysis Paralysis

Problem:

A problem is broken down more and more because it is not obvious how far is far enough. May also stem from trying to avoid accountability for failed results. May be expressed as micromanagement.
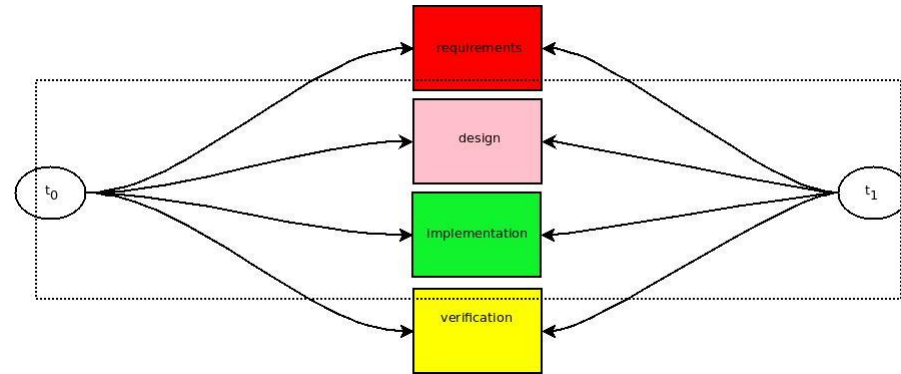
Solution:

Incremental development, prototyping, a willingness to fail on the road to success

Avalanche Model

Problem:

A combination of Waterfall and Agile software development methodologies. Instead of breaking the project into parts that each sequentially go through the phases of development, the entire project inhabits all phases of development simultaneously.

Solution:

Well defined model and Firm requirements/implementation for all three areas (process, product, project). If using Agile, use the whole methodology; if using Waterfall, minimize overlap of the steps.

Loose Cannon / Corncob

Problem:

Difficult people exacerbate already difficult environments or situations. Usually related to personality or motivational differences. Characterized by drama or destructive behavior. May be an over-politicized.

Solution:

A proper understanding of the agenda of each party involved. Give the naysayer responsibility for the solution. Ask for clarification in ambiguous statements. Isolate the issue at hand from rhetoric. Possible removal of problem team member.

Intellectual Violence

Problem:

Someone who understands a theory, technology, or buzzword uses this knowledge to intimidate others in a public or meeting situation. Results in a closed, defensive culture.

Solution:

A culture of mentoring, where more experienced personnel are encouraged to share knowledge to promote overall success of the team/organization. Facilitated by leadership through example.

Fire Drill

Problem:

Early on, the project is characterized by lack of progress, caused by uncertainty or shifting requirements. Late in the timeline, an ambitious or unrealistic goal is set for completion resulting in loss of quality.

Solution:

Project Management sheltering. Internally (w/ the team), progress is measured and steady, and the PM acts as a single liaison to management and most stakeholders. Long-term solution requires leadership support and culture change.

Blame Storming

Problem:

Team members admire the problem, describe how things got that way, and where to place blame and responsibility. Has a tone of inquisition and forces people to shelter rather than learn from mistakes.

Solution:

Measure progress based on facts, not opinions. Focus on the most important issues first – and the actions needed to resolve them, rather than the blame. Create a culture where mistakes are learning opportunities, not points of weakness.

Death March

Problem:

Everyone knows that the project is going to be a disaster except the only one that has the authority to kill it. May be expressed as unrealistic scope, schedule, or utilization of resources.

Solution:

Avoid arbitrary deadlines and plan projects so that they have high visibility to those in charge. Estimate accurately and with conviction. Success after the fact should be rewarded so that the reward matches or exceeds the (time, emotional, etc.) price paid by resources.
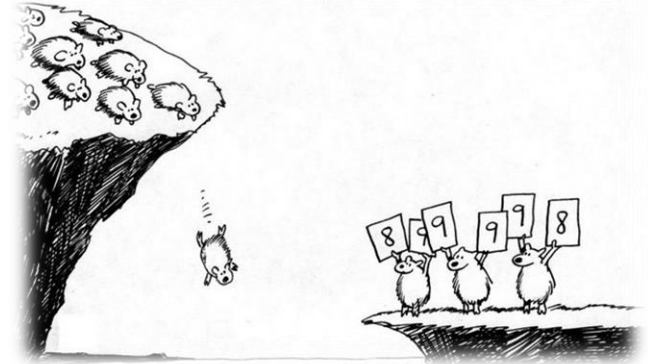
Groupthink

Problem:

Occurs within a group of people, in which the desire for harmony or conformity in the group, results in an incorrect or deviant decision-making outcome. Lacks critical evaluation of alternative ideas or viewpoints.

Solution:

Conflict should not be viewed as negative. Divide the group into several teams trying to solve the same problem. Leaders should be replaced with facilitators when possible. When possible, discuss group decisions and opinions with resources outside of the group. Assign a different "devil's advocate" each time.

Questions/Discussion