3 Common Pitfalls in Product Development Projects

Wed, 10/21/2015 - 9:57am
by Doug Ringer, Product Development & Marketing Expert

Things go awry during product development projects. While many pitfalls will undoubtedly be specific to an industry or a discipline, I’ve identified several that span both many industries and disciplines.

These issues are common to many projects in many industries. The interesting part of these pitfalls is that they are behavioral and not technological. Therefore, these behaviors can be modified through mentoring or coaching.

The pitfalls to avoid are:

1. Hubris
2. Ignoring the facts
3. Poor planning

Hubris

Merriam Webster defines hubris in two ways – the first is an exaggerated pride or self-confidence, and the second is a foolish amount of pride or confidence. Both of these definitions can lead a project down a path of tough or no return. I’ve witnessed technical and non-technical projects go awry simply because of the arrogance and foolish self-confidence of some of team leaders and members.

Some examples of these types of failures are:

- Engineering teams who claim to know the technology
but find themselves unable to solve problems due to missing key knowledge they claimed to possess

- Marketing teams developing product launches based on little knowledge of customers and their needs
- Product managers who consider other departments “beneath” them and refuse to learn from them

**Ignoring the facts**

Have you ever heard the phrase “head in the sand? ” While Ostriches do not actually hide their heads in the sand when danger approaches (they are actually turning their eggs), many a project has been endangered by ignoring the facts.

Ignoring the facts has two main root causes. The first is hubris discussed above; simply assuming the facts can be changed based on knowledge or more likely arrogance. The second is wishful thinking, typically described as “hope.” I’ve told my teams (and my family) “hope is not a plan.” It may feel good in the moment, but lack of fact-based action will waste time and money, and cause unnecessary angst.

**Poor planning**

The lack of acceptable project and product performance is most frequently due to poor planning. The root of this planning problem is typically not the nuts-and-bolts of the planning process itself—it is the errant data gathering and analysis that takes place early in the project.

The inputs may be jaded by hubris and lack of facts thus causing the plan it to be inaccurate and results unattainable. There is no complex software system or critical-chain analysis can save a project from a foundation built on “sand.” Rigorous data gathering and fact-checking is needed to ensure a sound foundation.

**Conclusion**

There you have them—the three pitfalls common in product
development that can undermine or even prevent success. I’ve seen this happen in at least a half-dozen firms across as multiple industries. These are not technology or market problems. They are behavioral issues that can be corrected with effective management, and mentoring or coaching.