

# Beware the Unchartered Project

An unchartered project is an oxymoron to most project managers. Kind of like the unsponsored project. It just doesn't compute. No sponsor, no project. No charter, no project.

But take a look at the mountain of stuff on your desk. How many unchartered projects are in there? After all, it's not like there's a magic threshold for budget, time, or other resources needed for something to be a project.

If it's got a beginning and an end, i.e., it's temporary, and it's creating something new or unique, it's a project and it should be chartered. Look again. How many do you have?

Why wouldn't you charter everything that fits the definition of a project? A number of reasons may be given for not getting charters for small projects, including:

- The time spent writing, submitting, and keeping track of a charter is better spent just doing the project.
- No one really needs to know about this project since it only affects "us." It's not worth raising a bunch of flags.
- It is a hassle explaining the reasons for the project to people who just don't "get it."
- We aren't that formal around here.
- They may tell me that we shouldn't be doing the project. I'd rather ask for forgiveness.

by:

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## Beware the Unchartered Project *(cont.)*

Maybe this works for your organization. Maybe these under-the-radar projects don't have any hidden costs for you, your department, or your organization.

But maybe it's not working so well.

If, for example, you ever find yourself unable to explain how non-project work, i.e., ops, maintenance, support, etc. accounts for all the time you're not working on projects, then maybe some of that unsanctioned project work needs more transparency.

Or if your request for additional department resources falls on deaf ears, it may be fair to ask if those who make that decision are completely aware of where your time actually goes.

If you find yourself backed into a corner without an explanation as to why you aren't meeting project commitments, it may be time to think about chartering some of those covert efforts.

In addition, the benefit to the organization is that when all projects, including those pesky little projects, get chartered, there's a better chance that everyone's priorities will be aligned. It's pretty hard for everyone to share a priority list without the same items on the list.

It may seem like management just doesn't "get it," but how well-versed are you in the organization's objectives and strategic goals? If you can't articulate that and see how your time is aligned with helping the proverbial ship get to where it needs to go, then maybe it's a question of who is getting what.

Like everything else, the charter needs to be scaled appropriately. One page with bulleted items in a big font may suffice. What are the minimum items that need to be agreed upon and understood? Project purpose, benefits, resources needed, estimated timeline? Whatever works.

As long as there's a place for a signature for someone to sanction your time. You just need enough to get it on the organization's radar.

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