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*Note: The MindGrove website has additional useful working and training materials on its resource pages.*

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## Project coming up? – our top thirteen<sup>1</sup> risks to think about...

Many projects go wrong and end up disappointing their sponsors. Actually, too many of them.

Use MindGrove’s checklist during project audits to help make sure you’ve considered and can troubleshoot these commonly occurring risks.

Any project may at risk in the following respects:	We’ll deal with these issues through these countermeasures and controls....
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Due to a lack of specification clarity there could be a dispute over project content, coverage or context - by an individual, a party, the group or the consortia. Fuzzy specifications mean that no-one really understands what is required. You could end up wasting extraordinary amounts of time, money and effort on producing the wrong outcome.</li> <li>2. Because of a failure to scope each party’s responsibilities clearly there could be a dispute over who is or was supposed to do what. A second major project killer and seen so frequently when one individual turns to another and says: “I thought you were responsible for that?” This is also a black-hole issue where some elements of the project disappear without trace only to be discovered at a date that is too later or inconvenient.</li> <li>3. Because of lack of project structure and vague management processes there could be a failure to deliver on time/within budget or with desired functionality. Comprehensive planning will not eliminate project risk, but a clear understanding of drift in project times and budgets coupled with a willingness to bring these factors back on track will make all the difference between success and disappointment. Why not use probabilistic time estimation process to get a better grip on reality?</li> </ol>	

<sup>1</sup> Yes, the number thirteen is bad news for projects too!

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<p>4. There is a failure to recognise and manage project difficulties at an early stage - leading to pushing on when a rethink is required. This may lead to project failure. Project risks do not go away they just lay there quietly and come and get you at the most inconvenient moment. If things appear to be getting difficult then you <b>are</b> probably in difficulties. Practice active risk assessment and, more to the point, comprehensive risk management to help deal with issues.</p> <p>5. Team communications are, or may have been, compromised leading to project misdirection. When stress increases communications tend to taper off – ensure you continue to monitor and manage stress levels and communications channels throughout the project.</p> <p>6. Because of a lack of interaction and communication with existing staff and system owners there could be a failure to design an effective user interface. Not everyone is part of the project team. Ensure that you bring all stakeholders – those with an interest in the outcome – into the process.</p> <p>7. Because of a lack of sufficient planned-for testing there could be a failure to deliver a robust and operationally efficient system - leading to an early and major system rework and unplanned-for levels of maintenance. Says it all doesn't it?</p> <p>8. Because analysis is/was not extended far enough into adjoining systems - resulting in fuzzy knowledge - there may be difficulties in integrating with existing system/s or across functional boundaries. Beware the notion of integration. If you have a project that includes integration into existing structures rank it “high risk”, carefully explore the interfaces, and develop a plan for proof of concept experiments before you commit to an outcome.</p>	

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<p>9. Because of lack of detailed information about legacy data there may be a failure during migration of existing data - leading to unnecessary additional workload or major system stoppages. This ties into the previous risk – if you have a project that requires integration with existing systems or processes and requires data migration – then you have a “very high risk” project. Carefully explore the data, and develop a plan for proof of concept experiments before you commit to an outcome.</p> <p>10. Because there are no plans to cleanse existing data – there will be an unnecessary generation of additional case or transaction backlogs and the possibility of the generation of mis-leading MIS reports. You always meant to clean up your data, didn't you? now you are stuck with doing it whilst under pressure. Again develop a plan for proof of concept experiments before you commit to an outcome.</p> <p>11. Because there is no provision to correctly/independently balance old financial information to new data system contents – there is a possibility of significant accounting errors being introduced. Think also of SOX.</p> <p>12. Because no reliance can be placed on the data available to size the system correctly – there is the dual possibility of an early and expensive hardware, software or network upgrade being required, or of receiving a poorer than expected system performance, thus compromising the business case. Build in headroom, spare capacity, into all designs.</p> <p>13. There is insufficient provision for the preparation of user information, user training, user documentation and operational user help - leading to a clean roll out being compromised and low levels of customer service. And organisations do this again and again until one day the penny drops and they realise that they are throwing away a substantial part of their ROI!</p>	

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