



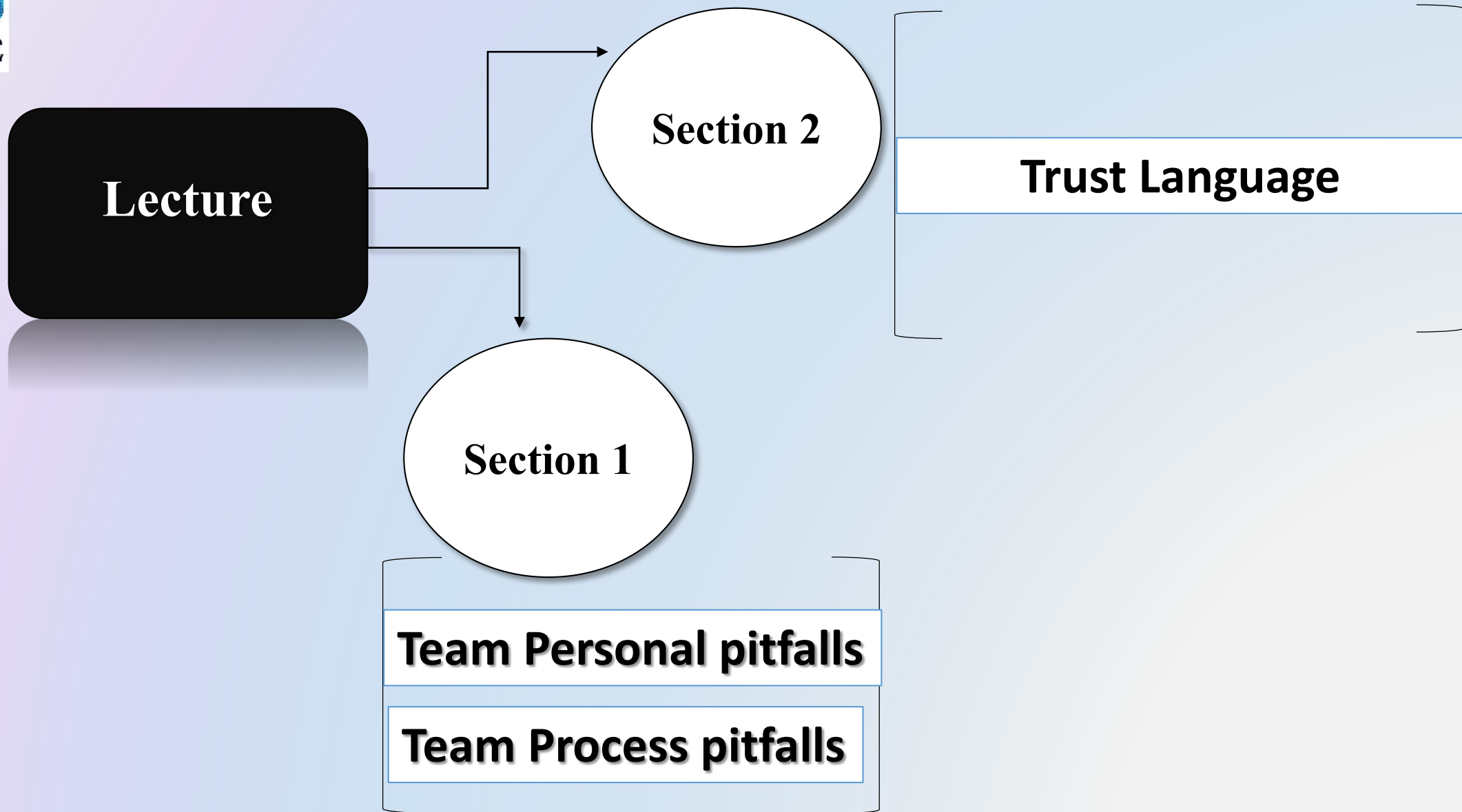
Everyone's Smart
University

Team pitfalls

Chapter 11

PMG112

Project communication



Section one

Team Personal pitfalls

Team Pitfalls

Some errors are available to any group of people working together through a plan or circumstance. The following pitfalls apply to team interaction with each other and with those around them - their effects are felt within the team and on the project they are working on:

Team Personal Pitfalls

These pitfalls arise due to behavioral differences and character conflicts.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Blamestorming

During a "blame storm," team members spend unproductive time admiring the problem, describing how it went, and seeking to assign blame and responsibility. This has the tone of the Inquisition and forces people to quarter rather than learn from mistakes.

- **The Fix:**
- 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 weaknesses.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Blowhard Jamboree

In this pitfall, opinions, misinformation, or bias of (so-called) experts improperly influence important decisions. Because these opinions or misinformation are often touted as facts, they can form a flawed basis for planning, estimating, and other important project decisions that carry repercussions down the line.

- **The Fix:**

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 poor sources of misinformation by assigning or seeking subject matter experts who are responsible for finding and sharing relevant, fact-based input.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Groupthink

One of the more well-known pitfalls, groupthink happens when teams value harmony and conformity over diversity of thought. This typically results in a less creative decision-making process and less opposing viewpoints, defeating one of the main benefits of making decisions as a group.

- **The Fix:**

Conflict should not be viewed as negative and the leader should be replaced with a facilitator if possible to avoid undue influence. Other options include randomly dividing the group in half and separating for two concurrent sub-group discussions.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Heroics

Some projects succeed in spite of poor planning, execution, and expectation management due to long hours, overtime, and neglectful singlemindedness. “Heroes,” the team’s most valuable members whose extraordinary effort lead to project “success,” often feel overworked and under-appreciated, which may lead to their departure. Project leaders or team members who see the project schedule realistically are often seen as pessimists or “non-believers.”

- **The Fix:**
- Because this practice seems to be a part of so many organizational cultures, modern methods such as Agile emphasize a “sustainable pace”.
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- Remember that encouraging a “can-do” attitude can create an environment that suppresses accuracy in estimates and execution.
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- Strive to build a culture that values good work/life balance

Team Personal Pitfalls

Intellectual Violence

This practice commonly plays out as one party understands a theory, technology, or buzzword uses this knowledge to intimidate or subjugate others in a public or meeting situation.

This can result in a closed and defensive culture where everyone becomes afraid of revealing inexperience or lack of understanding in an ever-escalating war of information. Keep in mind that this sometimes happens inadvertently.

- **The Fix:**

The awareness that another party doesn't know something is a make-or-break moment—instead of intellectual violence, the same situation makes the perfect opportunity for mentorship between the two parties, and a potentially disastrous situation becomes an opportunity for personal and team growth.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Loose Cannon

Delivering projects and working in the team environment often comes with tight deadlines, difficult work products, and a whole host of variously unpleasant conditions. Because of these conditions, a team member who constantly creates disruption can have a multiplicative effect on the rest of the team. Often putting politics before substance, these individuals can have a demotivating effect on the team and present a risk to the project.

- **The Fix:**

Beyond obvious tactics like termination, this risk can often be mitigated by providing the loose cannon with a mentor or one-on-one time with the manager. If the resource is an expert or the quality of their work is valuable, physically transferring them or offering a work-from-home option could alleviate the situation.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Poor project team/ stakeholder relations

In some cases, stakeholders just won't "click" with the project team. This may be because of differences in personality (i.e. motivators, influencers, culture), the result of schedule pressure, or because of unrealistic expectations each group has on the other.

The reality is that business is often conducted in ways that cause friction—negotiation, financial transactions, market forces, and priority are all potential "agitators" that contribute to this intense dynamic.

• The Fix:

- If friction is occurring with stakeholders, the simplest option may be to choose one person in either party through which to funnel all communication.
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- In stressful times, some grumbling is common and could even provide some stress relief, but this should remain internal to the team. Proper estimating, scheduling, tracking, and risk management activities will often alleviate or remove the largest stressors.

Team Personal Pitfalls

Wishful thinking

Wishful thinking may be the most common pitfall teams experience. Examples include insufficient planning, ignoring risks, creating overly optimistic schedules, asking for an extended deadline but offering to complete more work before that deadline and assuming that contractors or external resources will always deliver quality work on time with little monitoring.

- **The Fix:**

Don't confuse positive thinking or optimism with wishful thinking.
Realistically consider future scenarios—if one or more elements of your plan require things to go “just right,” you may be falling victim to wishful thinking.

The only real cure for this is realistic planning/scheduling/tracking

Section one

Team Process pitfalls

Team Process Pitfalls

In addition to problems that arise when individuals come together as a team, the act of initiating, planning, and executing project work contributes its own set of perils that need to be monitored for and addressed to ensure smooth operation.

The following pitfalls mostly relate to the processes needed to effectively carry out a project:

Team Process Pitfalls

Analysis Paralysis

Although many teams make the opposite mistake, analysis paralysis involves a reluctance to move out of the early planning stages of a project. This may be caused by a fear of failure or accountability, micromanagement, or a problem that has no apparent solution. If a project spends too much time in these stages, it may experience schedule pressure at later stages or even “death by planning”—an overly complex plan that crushes project work with process.

- **The Fix:**

If the problem seems unsolvable, prototyping may help. Otherwise, the team may benefit from an incremental process and a willingness to learn from failure.

Team Process Pitfalls

Fire Drill

The early causes of a “fire drill” include uncertainty around requirements or design, a hesitation to begin, or another early-project delay. Later in the project cycle, a series of ambitious or unrealistic goals are set or priorities are shifted frequently resulting in constant chaos.

In some organizations, the constantly changing, reactive nature of fire drills is the norm. It should be noted that some team members prefer this chaos, because their mediocre work is less likely to be noticed. At all costs, however, these situations are red flags that should not be ignored.

- **The Fix:**

Short of changing the circumstances, “project leader sheltering” is the most readily available solution. In this model, progress is internally steadied and better planned; externally, the leader acts as a single liaison to management and most stakeholders, rationally prioritizing work for the team to mitigate the chaos experienced earlier in the project’s life cycle.

Team Process Pitfalls

Ineffectively Adding Resources to the team

Although many examples of this exist, the two most common are a lack of a proper training and integration procedure for new team members and the ineffective managing of contractors.

In some cases, project leaders try adding people late in the project hoping to “catch up” on missed work only to find that integrating the new resources leaves the team further behind.

- **The Fix:**

Adding resources should be planned with the understanding of when they are needed, how much lead time is needed to “bring them up to speed,” and how much management effort will be needed to utilize them effectively.

Team Process Pitfalls

Ineffectively Adding Resources to the team

Rushing to the execution phase of projects can become so commonplace that people may begin to accept the consequences of doing so as fact rather than circumstance.

Examples of vital planning steps that are often shortchanged in this situation include receiving stakeholder approval on requirements/specifications, design iterations, estimation activities, and risk management. Failing to properly complete *upstream* activities like these can have a major effect on the final product's quality.

- **The Fix:**

The obvious solution here is to properly consider important early-project activities; one strategy that may help is to adopt a process that rewards a commitment to these activities and has well-respected “gates” which require thoroughly completing each step before proceeding to the next.

Team Process Pitfalls

Scope creep

Also known as “feature creep,” scope creep involves the slow addition of new features or requirements/specifications as the project progresses, ultimately exerting a major, negative impact on the schedule or resources. It should be noted that scope creep is just as likely to come from the project team as from the customer.

- **The Fix:**

Strong “change management” activities, such as requiring signoff for scope changes, forces proper consideration of potential creep. Proper documentation can also be helpful, as in some cases parties may not actually know they are causing an expansion of scope.

Team Process Pitfalls

Silver Bullet

In the same way that a silver bullet may be considered a quick and easy solution for werewolves, many teams make the mistake of thinking that a new tool, technology, or process will have magical effect on their projects.

This impression might come from wishful thinking or other projects that have seen (or advertised) success. As reality sets in, many projects find themselves behind schedule, their mistaken optimism turned to disappointment.

- **The Fix:**

Just as potential problems are managed as risks, so should opportunities
Like risks, opportunities aren't certainties and should be approached systematically and cautiously.

Are Pitfalls risks?

The short answer is yes, but they are unlikely to appear on most risk registers. Because of their broad, universal nature, pitfalls are hard to quantify into the probability and impact calculations needed to analyze them. They are a risk that must be monitored by both the team and the team leader, and simply understanding the nature of each pitfall is often enough to promote resistance to their taking root.

Each of the pitfalls in this chapter represents a constant hazard to both the team and the project it's working on, but there are parts of the project that represent "hot-spots," or areas of increased likelihood where the pitfall may manifest itself.

Are Pitfalls risks?

If pitfalls do occur, their negative results will inevitably manifest themselves later in the project when “the damage has already been done.” Put another way, mistakes or circumstances have a *downstream* effect on a project—this means that project leaders must carefully consider *upstream* manifestations of pitfalls as the project progresses and work to mitigate their effects down the road.

Team Pitfalls

Although these pitfalls seem diverse, avoiding and resolving them long-term requires the following:

- An awareness of both what can happen and when it's most likely to occur,
- Diligence and continuous introspection,
- Management and leadership support, and
- A deliberate culture shift within the team and organization.

Section Two

Trust Language

Language

Two communication factors make up the impact towards this goal. One is language, the words that flow in leadership communications. The other is the result of the personality of the leader when the person delivering the message becomes the message.

Leadership Language

We start with the end in mind. The purpose of leadership communication—ideas turned into language—is to influence stakeholders to accept, believe in, and advocate for the values involved in project success.

Faith is not automatic

The information flow is affected by a lot of filters, some of which enable, and some of which disable the sender's intent.

Communicators in any organization must understand that the content of what they embark on will be influenced by prevailing contexts. Acceptance of the organization's mission is conditional on the external and internal work contexts and the communicator's reputation and skills.

The challenge of the context of business communication is very high. “Mastering leadership communication becomes a priority for all individuals who desire to lead others and want their groups, organizations, or the broader community to follow, trust, and see them as leaders.”

Faith is not automatic

This relates to this purpose, which is emphasized in the following guidelines; However, one of the essential steps for any organization should be to make the company's website a consistent source of relevant current and historical evidence of the company's performance and values. The site will include statements, speeches, questions and answers, and access to records and evidence.

And this enterprise front door should be lively and reliable, and we recommend that it be able to swing both ways: conveying information and inviting questions and comments.

Make telling the truth a linguistic habit

Driving language is situational language, in that it needs to be appropriate for the occasion. However, there is a constant necessity for messages in any and all situations; This is telling the truth.

“Employees, customers, stockholders, and the news media easily identify falsification or spinning of half-truths,”

"When management actions or statements do not pass the 'smell test', credibility is the direct victim."

Block called telling the truth the first line of defense in protecting the company's reputation and leadership's credibility.

Think otherwise

“The cat may look at the king, as the old saying goes, but the visual message is more interesting if (the cat) also knows what a king is.” The sender must use a language code that is understandable to the receiver.

If you, as the chief communication officer, the communication strategy is to know the goal you are aiming for, properly assess the surrounding contexts, and understand what the primary target recipients are willing to absorb and understand as fully as possible. The potential of direct personal communication

Here, we repeat our “Think Otherwise” directive: Tuning the mind channel your stakeholders are constantly listening: How do your words respond to their needs and their ability to decode and understand their meaning?

Make the encoded message decodable

Corporate speakers and writers (the leaders and their communication advisors) choose the words they hope to convey to the recipients (stakeholders as well as neutral and critical audiences) the intended meanings and (to stakeholders) the connecting values. Description of the "incomplete system"

By Alessandra and Hunsaker, it involves the fact that even the best-quality listener or reader receives the message through a series of filters: his or her past experiences, perception of the sender, emotional involvement in the message, understanding of verbal content, level of interest,... again and again. In a sense, he (the intended recipient) translates the message into his own words, creating his own version of what he thinks the speaker was saying, Alessandra and Hunsaker said.

Get Feedback

To actualize improvement in leadership communication, you need feedback. This is most accessible within the organization, through internal surveys, questions asked to the audience after an internal presentation, and through informal (but planned and strategic) conversations with leaders, managers, and employees. External relations officers, whose team members are frequently involved in setting up internal communication, are generally responsible for following up on feedback, working with HR when it is mutually beneficial.

External comment strategies include engaging in social media research, monitoring stakeholder conversations, blogs, and other online streams related to the flow of company information.

Digital devices dominate

An official letter from the CEO may be necessary; It is a good idea to create the record that the chief of staff, the board of directors, and many others may need, and may be considered for publication on the company's website.

What could be lacking, if not in sync with the needs of employees and other stakeholders, is speed, particularly access to employees how and where they are connected. Employees get information and opinions through their mobile devices and desktop computers connected to the Internet.

Promote the company's "language of trust" online

The Internet has made conversation with stakeholders - the flow of information and feedback - an endless proposition. The trust challenge is never closed. In online sharing, a company communicator can understand online language and wink-wink terminology (from one of the oldest, LOL, streams of these acronyms).

Maslansky offers online trust language guidelines like these:

1. Use internet style and content boundaries to express the same main points (headlines and attention grabbing) that you use in newsletters, speeches, and blogs.
2. Responding to online critics with rational and evidence-backed comments rather than enduring “a silence that compromises the floor.”
3. Use online facilities, such as links to other people's messages, to expand the conversation in ways that help you tell your story. And,
4. Use the company's website to take advantage of the expanded conversation online.

Thank You