

Law of the Five Deadly Sins

Emotional maturity involves having an ecosystem that supports the skills to be self-aware, socially aware, self-managed, and able to manage relationships. These are all important skills for a healthy project ecosystem. To fully exploit these skills, project leaders, executives, and all stakeholders need to know how to deal with the frailties of human nature. These frailties often show up in a project as the Five Deadly Sins. In fact, The Law of the Five Deadly Sins states you will encounter the Five Deadly Sins in all projects. As a project leader, once you know how to deal with the Five Deadly Sins you can set the agenda, manage expectations, and move the process along.

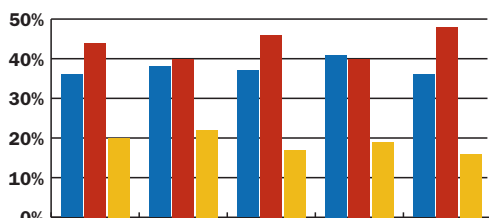


Chart 1: **Classic CHAOS Results
2009 to 2013**

The resolution of all software projects from 2004 to 2013 within the CHAOS database.

Definition: *“Emotional maturity” is the ability and capacity to perceive, assess, manage, and direct the emotions and actions of the project stakeholders. It is the ability to identify and remove unnecessary requirements, as well as the aptitude to deliver bad news and accept critical feedback. It is the skill to recognize and deal with the Five Deadly Sins of project management, which are overambition, arrogance, ignorance, abstinence, and fraudulence.*

During a recent Standish Group presentation, one of the delegates raised this question: “Why do software-intensive projects have such a poor success rate at completing on time, within budget, and providing what the customer needs? We (IT professionals) are constantly being brought in to evaluate why software projects fail or have such poor performance when they are delivered.” While there is no single answer to the question, root causes can be found in the success factor we call “emotional maturity.” People cause projects to succeed or fail, and those who possess emotional maturity fare better with project success.

The first of the Five Deadly Sins is overambition, which is a strong desire to execute a significant project to gain fame, fortune, or power through the impact of overreaching goals. The second sin is arrogance, the unwarranted, overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward superiors, peers, and inferiors. The third sin is ignorance, the condition of being unaware, uninformed, uneducated, and/or unsuspecting about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. This condition is often coupled with apathy.

The fourth deadly sin is abstinence, which is the act or practice of refraining from participation in and contribution to the project. The last and fifth deadly sin is fraudulence, which is an action intended to deceive; it is deliberate trickery intended to gain an advantage or to avoid confrontation. In the following pages we look at each of these sins, define them, and provide advice on how to manage them.

Overambition

Overambition is a strong desire to execute a significant project to gain fame, fortune, or power through the impact of overreaching goals. Emotional maturity starts with understanding what traits to look for in project participants. No sin is more dangerous to a project than overambition. There are five simple things you can do to overcome overambition. The first thing you should do is a risk assessment. The benefits of doing an overall risk assessment include highlighting behaviors that are causing the project to overrun, and providing management with the ability to mitigate them. Second, you should prioritize the project's requirements. The benefit of looking at the ROI and risk of each requirement is to allow management to focus on the high-value items and eliminate the low-value, high-risk items.

Third, reduce requirements within a stage or iteration. The benefits of reducing requirements allow management to contain the scope and bring a focus to high-value items. Fourth is to improve communication. The benefit of improving communication among all stakeholders is the effect of spreading the responsibility of the project's successes and failures throughout the organization. This allows everyone to embrace the need for success, knowing they will also share in the failure. Fifth is to create a staged or iteration deployment. The benefit of rolling out features and functions in stages is to take the focus off the complete project and instead put it on a smaller endeavor, thus allowing the organization to have some quick wins and get a quicker return as well as reduce risk.

There is nothing wrong with ambition. In the movie *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas' character says, "Greed is good." Ambition is also good. Without ambition, where would we be? However, uncontrolled ambition is the problem—it's like a tornado. The point is to control and funnel ambition to accomplish some useful goal. Sometimes ambition gets in the way of actual success. As the great philosopher Gordon Divitt said, "Success is not you doing it. Success is it getting done."

How to Overcome Overambition

From our definition, overambition is a strong desire to execute a significant project to gain fame, fortune, or power through the impact of overreaching goals. This is not to say that ambition is not good. It is essential for a project to not only get going, but to survive its trials and tribulations. However, unchecked overambition will cause a project to fail or be severely challenged. The first thing is to recognize the difference between overambition and ambition. You need ambition, and many times you want to raise the bar and overreach to have a competitive edge. Certainly you do not want to stifle ambition. So you must consider the goals in light of the resources, schedules, and the "true" motivation of the sponsors and stakeholders. If you fully understand the aspects of ambition and overambition, then you can take action to overcome this destructive deadly sin.

Definition: "Overambition" is a strong desire to execute a significant project to gain fame, fortune, or power through the impact of overreaching goals. "Overreaching" is to defeat oneself by going too far or by doing or trying to gain too much too soon. Sometimes overreaching is good, but both overambition and overreaching should be recognized and the risk considered and carefully managed.

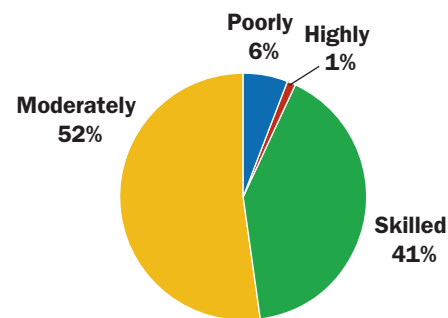


Chart 2: **Overambition**

The chart shows how IT executives rated the skill-level of their project workforce in the project management skill of overcoming overambition.

Action:

Once you have recognized that overambition is causing harm to the project, you must deal with it head-on. Certainly you need to update the project plan, review requirements and scope, and validate roles and responsibilities. You need to take a hard look at both the business and the technical requirements. You need to either create or enhance your communication platform with regular meetings and/or a steering committee. By prioritizing and freezing requirements you can then start to deliver quicker results, thus feeding the ambition cycle and capitalizing on it rather than fighting it.

Four Suggestions:

1. **Improve Communications:** This should be done by having regular meetings and a steering committee.
2. **Assess Risk and Cost:** Reevaluate the scope with special focus on cost and risk.
3. **Prioritize Requirements:** Once you reevaluate the scope, look at the requirements that give you the best possible gain with the least risk.
4. **Stage Deployment:** Break the project into stepping-stones and deliver in small implementations. Provide stakeholders with usable functionality to build confidence in the project.

Arrogance

Arrogance is the unwarranted, overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward superiors, peers, and inferiors. Arrogance correlates pretty closely with past successes. Very often you will run into a development team that just came off a successful project, and they are so full of themselves that they fall prey to “overambition” and think they are infallible. The team often does not have enough humility to step back and ask themselves: Can we really do this, or are we going beyond the state of the art? So they become filled with hubris and there is really no self-examination of what is hard and what can’t or can be done.

Arrogance often creates an environment where the team will skip doing a risk assessment or prototyping and jump right into developing the application or product. Arrogance also correlates with intelligence and creativity. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance and it is very blurry. It is very important for you to know when a person has crossed the line from self-confidence into arrogance. Often people will go from confidence to arrogance without realizing it. Ask difficult questions so you can assess if the person knows what they are talking about or if they are just being arrogant.

There are five simple things you can do to overcome arrogance. First is concurrency: All executives should be in same boat and they should sink or swim together, thereby making sure that no one is left on the outside to be able to take “pot shots” at the team and the project. Second, compensation such as bonuses and raises should be tied to executive compensation and should be based on the success of the project. This will ensure that all the executives have a stake in a successful outcome.

The third thing is to build consensus. Consensus helps create an agreement about the goals of the project. Have a common definition of what success means in relationship to the project’s resolution. The fourth is conciliation. There should be a formal outside mediation or intervention process that would be engaged when two or more parties cannot resolve their differences. Last is contingency; nothing is more humbling than considering the possibility of failure. The team should look at all the risks and develop contingencies in case of failure.

How to Deal with Arrogance

From our definition, arrogance is the unwarranted, overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward superiors, peers, and subordinates. Years ago, a start-up firm hired 12 of the most talented people in their jobs and profession. This was an all-star team that could not be matched. The company failed within six months of inception, without having completed a single task. None of the players could ever agree on when and how to do even the simplest tasks. Decisions took days and weeks with constant back-and-forth arguments. In addition, when a decision was made it was revisited time and time again. Arrogance can and does stifle a project’s progress and success.

Definition: “Arrogance” is the unwarranted, overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward superiors, peers, and inferiors. Arrogance denotes overconfident pride and hubris. Hubris is often associated with a lack of knowledge, interest in, and exploration of history, combined with a lack of humility. In Ancient Greece, “hubris” referred to actions taken in order to shame and humiliate the victim, thereby making oneself seem superior. Really smart people do not need to make themselves feel better at the expense of others.

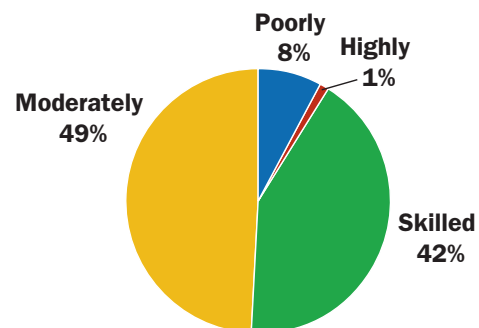


Chart 3: Arrogance

The chart shows how IT executives rated the skill-level of their project workforce in the project management skill of overcoming arrogance.

Action:

To deal with arrogance you must confront it directly. If the group itself is arrogant, then do exercises on the risk. If it is an individual, then you can try to learn from the person’s experience and feed his or her ego while attempting to mitigate the person’s negative effect on others and the project. If you tie advancement and compensation to the success of a project, it will tend to get people to better work together. Building consensus within an arrogant environment is a difficult task, but must be accomplished in order for the project to succeed. Contingency planning can take the starch out of the most arrogant person.

Four Suggestions:

1. Concurrency and Compensation: Tie a successful project outcome across all the stakeholders at all levels and use compensation as the rope.
2. Consensus: Make sure that everyone understands the goals and try to get as many stakeholders and as much buy-in as possible.
3. Conciliation: Use outside peers or hire consultants to help bring reality to the team. A review from independent, unbiased eyes will bring honesty to the project.
4. Contingency: Have stakeholders work on a contingency plan in case of failure. Develop a “Kill Switch” or alternative strategy that may salvage part of the work and costs.

Ignorance

Ignorance is the condition of being unaware, uninformed, uneducated, and/or unsuspecting about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. Ignorance is often coupled with apathy, or to say it another way, “I don’t know and I don’t care!” Tim Smith of Sapient said at CHAOS University that Sapient deals with ignorance in two ways, internally and externally. “In our company we spend a lot of time making sure our senior managers are aligned. It takes a big effort. At Sapient we have created a terminology around being not aligned. When we see people not aligned, it is common for us to state that we are not aligned. We then step back and look at what is going on. Externally we have a process to make sure everyone is on the same page and to make sure everyone has a common set of goals.”

Communication is the key to overcoming ignorance. Another CHAOS University delegate stated that at a former company, a new director of engineering was in an executive staff meeting making a presentation of a project on a new product. After a little while the company president piped up and asked why he was still working on the project, since it was cancelled two months ago. The delegate joked that the poor new director of engineering just stood there looking like a penny waiting for change.

There are five basic things you can do to overcome ignorance. First, get everyone to buy in. Not only should you build to a consensus, but you also need to make sure that everyone buys in to the plan and the project. Everyone does not have to agree with or approve the plan, but they must agree to be good team members and corporate soldiers. Second is to execute educational forums. Have educational forums, such as “Lunch and Learn,” that bring people up to date on the project’s progress and status. Third, create a steering committee and make sure all major stakeholders are part of the committee. For large bet-your-business-type projects, “C”-level executives should be part of the steering committee. Number four, create a common and easy-to-use communication platform and verify that effective communication is in place. Last is to take a close look at the risks and features and learn the reasons for the requirements.

How to Conquer Ignorance

Ignorance is the condition of being unaware, uninformed, uneducated, and/or unsuspecting about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. So much of information is transferred through meetings and emails. Stakeholders go from one meeting to the next, and emails pile up in the in-box. It is easy to get confused and forget or ignore important items. Even when people do attend the meetings, such as steering committee meetings, much information gets lost because the meeting is often conducted badly or the goal of the meeting is not clearly specified. Often the requirements documents being reviewed are written for a more technical person.

Definition: “Ignorance” is the condition of being unaware, uninformed, uneducated, and/or unsuspecting about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. Many stakeholders practice rational ignorance. “Rational ignorance” is when the cost of educating oneself about the issue sufficiently to make an informed decision can outweigh any potential benefit one could reasonably expect to gain from that decision. Therefore, it would be irrational to waste time doing so.

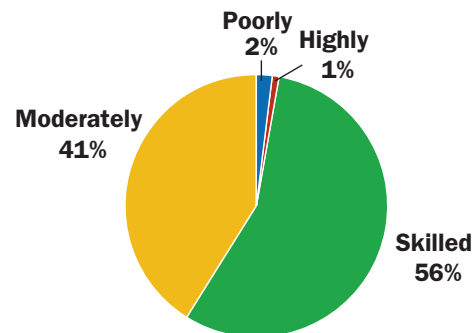


Chart 4: **Ignorance**

The chart shows how IT executives rated the skill-level of their project workforce in the project management skill of overcoming ignorance.

Action:

Create an environment that allows for clear and concise communications and education. Eliminate unnecessary verbiage and focus on the important issues. Create a decision process that allows for quick resolution. Make it multilevel so that many of the decisions get done at the lower levels and only the important business decisions get moved up the executive management chain. Long meetings, emails, and documents tend to lose effectiveness, so try to make them short and directly to the point. In this regard, you want everyone to have a clear understanding of who is accountable and responsible for items and actions.

Four Suggestions:

1. **Get Smart:** Create educational opportunities and mandate that all essential stakeholders participate in them.
2. **Simplify Communication:** Make all messages short, simple, and to the point. Long “ping-pong” type emails and copied messages often get ignored.
3. **Decision Pipelines:** Create and maintain easy-to-use decision pipelines to speed up critical decisions.
4. **Clarify Accountability:** Make sure everyone (all stakeholders at all levels) knows his or her responsibilities within the project.

Abstinence

Abstinence, in the context of project management, is the act or practice of refraining from participation and contribution to the project. Sharad Mehrotra, president of Fabric7, recalled an incident when he was at Sun Microsystems in which abstinence caused a major project to fail. In 1996 Mehrotra started a project to build the new Ultra SPARC Five. At the time, the latest chip was the Ultra SPARC One, so Ultra SPARC Five was two generations ahead. In the beginning it was a small team of six people for the processor design. Mehrotra said that the way these things worked in the early stages was that a few smart people with various useless educational degrees read all the papers, did a lot of deep thinking, and came up with the latest processor design direction.

The project code name was Millennium because the product would be announced in the year 2000. The specifications were written, and of course they said the new machine must do everything the old machine did. After various stops and starts, and personnel changes, Sun canceled the project in 2004, eight and a half years after it began and at a cost of over \$100 million. Mehrotra believes that early intervention by management would have saved the project.

There are five basic steps you can take to overcome abstinence. The first is required participation. Management needs to mandate that essential stakeholders participate in the project. Such mandates should be enforced with penalties for noncompliance. The second step is reinforcement. Management needs to reinforce the importance of the project and help stakeholders in their thinking.

The third step is to have regular and recurring communications. Management needs to make sure there are regular and recurring scheduled communications and meetings. The meetings should be advertised well in advance to avoid last-minute excuses. The fourth step is to remove and replace. Management must remove and replace stakeholders who do not participate in the project. If a stakeholder is to identify a potential replacement or successor, then management should engage the new stakeholder and assign deliverables to him or her. The last thing is to review and reevaluate. There should be a periodic review and reevaluation of the project's progress and goals to continually test the commitment and current requirements. Nothing makes people run away faster than a failing project.

How to Isolate Abstinence

"Abstinence," in the context of project management, is the act or practice of refraining from participation and contribution to the project. Abstinence is one of the most effective forms of passive-aggressive behavior and is a clear indication of deeper problems. When a stakeholder does not participate in the project's process, that person is telling the project team that he or she is not interested, it is not worth their time, they see no benefits for themselves, or their time is better spent on more worthwhile activities.

Definition: "Abstinence," in the context of project management, is the act or practice of refraining from participation and contribution to the project. "Nonparticipation" is withdrawing from the activities of the project and from the project in general. It also means that the person or persons do not want to be identified with the project or its activities.

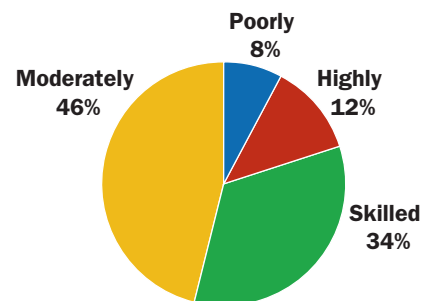


Chart 5: **Abstinence**

The chart shows how IT executives rated the skill-level of their project workforce in the project management skill of overcoming abstinence.

This could very well be true with the day-to-day pressures of meeting their own performance goals and keeping customers satisfied.

Action:

It is up to the project team to assess whether or not chronic abstinence is a sign of more troubling problems and not just people being too busy. If the team believes lack of participation is not due to the normal day-to-day priorities, then the individuals must be addressed before moving forward with the project. If, however, nonparticipation is business as usual within an organization, then these issues can be addressed by some simple and straightforward action items. First, it is essential that management support and reinforce the project's importance and require participation. Second, meetings and participation in them should be regular and recurring. It is best that these activities take place outside of peak business times. For example, most retail organizations would not want a project to go into the Christmas season. Third, remove, replace, and change any person who displays chronic abstinence with a person who can devote his or her time to the project.

Four Suggestions:

1. **Require:** Management needs to require that stakeholders at all levels participate and reinforce the project's importance.
2. **Regular:** Activities should be regular and recurring, with set goals and timeframes.
3. **Replace:** Remove and replace any member who does not participate in the normal project activities.
4. **Review:** Projects should be reviewed and reevaluated as to the value of stakeholder participation.

Fraudulence

Fraudulence is an action intended to deceive; it is deliberate trickery intended to gain an advantage or to avoid confrontation. Fraudulence can take many forms. In our new book, *The Public Execution of Miss Scarlet*, the title character does many things to try to cover up the real status of the project. Some of the things she does are intended to deceive her superiors and co-workers. Other things she does only fools herself into believing that she can turn things around. When she does confront her superior on the real status of the project she is rebuffed. Her stakeholders also refuse to believe the project is going badly. Others characters rationalize why they are having problems with the project. Still other characters just are in denial, all this while others in the story have their own fraudulent behavior.

Whether it is on purpose or just misguided judgment, fraudulence is a cancer and must be rooted out. Left untreated, fraudulence will take over the project and it will be doomed. In order to overcome fraudulence there are five things you can do. First, have public executions. Swift, public, and harsh actions must be taken against any person who either deliberately or inadvertently misleads stakeholders on the progress and status of a project. Second is to conduct ethics training. Management should provide ethical guidance and require all personnel and stakeholders involved with the project to participate in ethics training.

The third thing is transparency. One of the easiest ways to combat project fraudulence is through transparency. If everything is out in the open it is hard to fool people. Fourth, have standard measurements. Another way is having a known and verifiable measurement system. This way people will know what results to expect and when to expect them. Last, have a formal change management process. Change is always an area where things can and do go wrong. Having a formal and transparent change process will reduce this area of mischief. When you see fraudulence in the real world, it is really important to figure out if that person just has a blind spot or is deceptive. In other words, are they lying to themselves or to you? What you do in each case is very different.

How to Combat Fraudulence

Fraudulence is an action intended to deceive; it is deliberate trickery intended to gain an advantage, or more commonly to avoid confrontation. Duplicity can take many forms, from outright lies to sins of omission. Often fraudulence takes a more benign form, with individuals fooling themselves into believing things are not as they are or that in a little while things will get better. In this form it is both harder to detect early and can snowball. From this point, it also is more difficult to get back to the truth. The more acute form of fraudulence is outright deception. Outright deception is easier to detect and resolve.

Definition: “*Fraudulence*” is an action intended to deceive; it is deliberate trickery intended to gain an advantage or to avoid confrontation. *Fraudulence* is being contrary to the truth or reality through speech or action. It is falsely portraying true intentions by deceptive words or action. *Fraudulence*, in the project management sense, is lying to oneself.

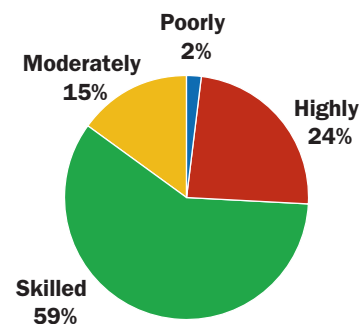


Chart 6: **Fraudulence**

The chart shows how IT executives rated the skill-level of their project workforce in the project management skill of overcoming fraudulence.

Action:

First, determine if the fraudulence is self-directed or is outright falsehood. If you discover outright falsehood, then swift and harsh action must be taken. You should have a zero-tolerance policy for this kind of behavior. Ethical training will cover both outright deception and self-inflicted deceit. A formal change process should help isolate areas that could cause misconception and sins of omission. A standard measurement structure will help track progress and provide for a more accurate and factual accounting transparency. In the end, the most important action is to demand transparency in all communications.

Four Suggestions:

1. **Ethics Training:** A mandate should be implemented for all personnel in the organization to attend an ethics training and education program.
2. **Transparency:** A system that can be seen from all angles and by all stakeholders will create an open and honest environment.
3. **Standard Measurement:** Using a standard measurement for tracking progress is preferable because it makes it easy and understandable.
4. **Formal Change Process:** Having a formal change process will prevent blindsiding and show the impact of changes on requirements.

Summary

The Law of the Five Deadly Sins states you will encounter the Five Deadly Sins in all projects. The Five Deadly Sins are part of all project ecosystems, healthy and unhealthy. In fact, a project cannot be successful without them. It is how you deal with each of these sins that will determine the success or failure of a project.

In order to gain a more full understanding of the Five Deadly Sins, read our book titled *The Execution of Miss Scarlet*. In this fictional tale, Kelly Roberts and his team seek the truth behind a failing project. The story begins when Crutec's board of directors hires Kelly and his sidekicks, Amanda Nickerson and Leroy Jefferson, to turn around the company's Project Skyview and make it successful.

The Five Deadly Sins are five out of the 100 success points in the CHAOS Chronicles. CHAOS University Personal Memberships offer all the current published success points, CHAOS reports, charts, and research. As a member, you will have immediate access to the latest CHAOS Knowledge Center. This dynamic, always up-to-date database includes the 100 most important points a project manager needs to know to be successful. These points and lessons, gleaned from our ongoing research, are now linked to a set of valuable online HowTos that will help you easily implement and incorporate the 100 points into your project management ecosystems.

The Law of the Five Deadly Sins report is based on the CHAOS project (private acronym), DARTS (Demand Assessment Requirements Tracking Studies), CENTS (Comparative Economic Normalization Technology Study), and other research instruments. All research participants must satisfy a qualification process and join our Standish User Research Forum (SURF). All data and information in this report should be considered Standish opinion and the reader bears all risk in the use of this opinion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND RESEARCH

Similar research reports are

- Emotional Maturity Research Report
- The Public Execution of Miss Scarlett
- CHAOS Manifesto 2014
- CHAOS Manifesto 2011



Many of the subjects within this report are subjects of CHAOS Tuesday, our Internet radio program. These shows include:

CHAOS Tuesday #4: Overcoming Fraudulence

CHAOS Tuesday #6: Dealing with Abstinence

CHAOS Tuesday #61: Toxic Person

CHAOS Tuesday #64: Overbearing Stakeholders



VALUE PORTFOLIO OPTIMIZATION AND MANAGEMENT SERVICE

Our Value Portfolio Optimization and Management Service is a forward-thinking and predictive visualization of the value of your software investments.

STEP 1: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

By focusing your project portfolio on value, our service frees your organization to create value. Our service offers the following benefits:

- High Returns on Investment
- More Innovations
- Greater Stakeholder Satisfaction
- Less Management Frustration
- Reduced Project Overhead

STEP 2: PROJECT PROFILES

The Value Portfolio Optimization and Management Service offers the following features:

- Rapid
- Simple
- Comprehensive
- Inexpensive
- Comprehensible

STEP 3: OPTIMIZATION CLINIC

The one thing we are not going to do is immediately change your process or try to sell you new and cumbersome tools. It really does not matter where you are in project management maturity. Our aim is to reduce or minimize the burden placed on you by expensive tools and complex processes. We do this through our three unique items:

- Research database of 50,000 projects
- Patented optimization formula
- Our insight into a broad set of projects

Our three-step method helps you focus on things that really count.

- **STEP 1:** Project Skills and Environmental Orientation
- **STEP 2:** Individual Project Optimization & Assessments
- **STEP 3:** Value Optimization Clinic

FOLLOW-UP: Each quarter The Standish Group will visit your organization to update your portfolio. Our Value Portfolio Optimization and Management Service helps you exceed and create value.