



## The Project Assassin

### Proven Techniques for Glorious Failure:

#### Lesson 3: Parts is Parts!



Pay attention my nascent project assassins. We have so many projects to crush, and so little time. Our best chance to wreak record project failure rates is to continue to pass on proven destructive techniques in this third lesson of my series. In this edition, we will explore the explosive power (pun intended!) of planning and managing exclusively in terms of FTE's (full time equivalents).

Remember, if challenged on these techniques, always respond with, "Everybody else does it." Often, this will create false comfort and enable you to send more lemmings over the cliff.

In planning large IT projects, the time-honored method is to estimate the number of hours required to complete each task, and to ensure that you have enough hours of people to meet that requirement. The simple logic of this approach makes it elegant and universal in its appeal. It is the feng shui of IT planning and it will take virtually no effort on your part to embed this thinking into the project planning process. Let's take it a few steps further.

- **Assume that people are interchangeable in your workplan.** Simply stated, if a task is estimated to take two person-days, it shouldn't matter who is assigned as long as they are given two days to complete it. After all, FTE's are generic and interchangeable. Oddly, people will spend *days* evaluating talent for a Fantasy Football draft, but are absolutely comfortable selecting a generic project team from a "who is leftover list." If experience doesn't matter when choosing a President or Vice President of the United States, it shouldn't matter for IT projects.

- Do your entire project resource “math” in FTE’s (full time equivalents). It shouldn’t matter whether you have one full time person or two half-time people as each provides eight hours of work. Convince others that full time people cannot be spared for a project and that the need should be staffed by fractions of multiple people instead. Stretch this thinking to its limit and replace one full-time person with 96 five-minute resources each day. This is the “Mr. Potato Head approach” to assigning resources (he’s a perfect FTE—two ears, two eyes, two feet and one nose). Dr. Frankenstein assembled a whole person from parts and it worked for awhile. We only need a little while because “projects are temporary.” When confronted on FTE math, ask whether it is addition or multiplication that they find so challenging. From the old Wendy’s chicken commercial, I call this the “Parts is Parts” philosophy.
- Rotate people on and off the team to keep them fresh. Once again, FTE’s are just FTE’s. Promise your project team fixed roll-off dates, no matter the project status. If the project gets extended, you can always replace the departed with another person with the same title. If they have the same title, this implies they have same experience, same insight, same project knowledge, same team chemistry and the same memories. You can pick up right where you left off. Since the first person already conquered the learning curve, the replacement shouldn’t need any ramp up time at all. Whatever you do, don’t add any hours to the project plan to cover hand-offs. Heck, assume that there will be no turnover at all—it is too hard to plan for anyways.

It will not be difficult to sell FTE-based planning and doom a project with respect to budget and schedule from Day One. FTE math is deeply embedded in most project plans with no adjustments made for the actual skills, experience or fragments of individual(s) assigned.

If you actually do run into resistance, tell them it is un-American to not think of FTE’s as interchangeable.

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all FTE’s are created equal...”*  
- slightly modified Declaration of Independence



*Avalion Tip: Individuals are not interchangeable. Base your estimates on the team experience that you are likely to staff with. If the actual staffing is materially different, adjust the resourcing, the deadlines, or the overall plan accordingly. This can be more significant than a major scope change.*

*Avalion Tip: Avoid the temptation to allow “two halves to equal a whole FTE.” The more fragmented a resource is, the more competing priorities will have an adverse affect on your project. Fragmented resources also require additional overhead in communications, coordination and supervision with each individual added—even if the total FTE count remains unchanged.*

*Avalion Tip: On a long project, budget meaningful time for hand-offs when people take new roles outside of the project, resign, or otherwise leave the team. It is time-consuming and expensive to repeatedly ascend the learning curve. You won’t know who is leaving, but you might be able to predict how many will. On projects nearing completion, work extra hard to keep the current team intact where it is more difficult to spin up a new resource without missing your live date.*

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About the Author: While the identity and whereabouts of the Project Assassin remain unknown, Kevin Christ, Vice President of IT Services with Avalion Consulting has spent his career battling the evil forces of the Project Assassin in program management, project management, and troubled project turnarounds. He is known for his business acumen, his technical insight, and a troubling sense of humor. Kevin has been a management consultant for almost 25 years and his full profile can be found at [www.linkedin.com/in/kchrist](http://www.linkedin.com/in/kchrist), and he can be emailed at [KChrist@Avalion.com](mailto:KChrist@Avalion.com).

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