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Assumptions Kill Strategy

BEST PRACTICES

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There is an old saying about what the word 'Assume' stands for. If you know the saying, you likely just smirked and maybe even said it out loud. If you don't know the saying, your partner or a colleague will likely know it and be happy to tell you. But at the root of it, making assumptions, specifically undocumented assumptions, almost always set you up for failure. Especially during a software project.

In a past article, I explored *Challenging Estimations* with our project teams and how much additional insight can be gained from other professionals with different points of view. Bringing in your team to help identify and provide direct answers to project assumptions is just as imperative. With the team and Product Owner, you can flesh out your personal assumptions as a leader and encourage the rest of the team to bring to light their assumption. Once you

receive the necessary clarity, you can adjust your acceptance criteria, identify previously unidentified stories, or determine that other stakeholders need to get involved to answer any lingering questions.

Don't Let Your Experience Be Your Downfall

I have been in the software development field for 15 years. For some reason, even with my years of experience, I still struggle with documenting and reducing the impact of assumptions. Perhaps I am thick headed, or maybe my experience works against me, thinking I know all... until I don't. No matter the reason, there are many tools to help you document and work through your assumptions, but your ego needs to allow you to properly do so. Our goal must be to address as many doubts as possible across all details of the project.

Eliminating Assumptions Supports Your Strategic Efforts

At Clientek, we pride ourselves on being strategic partners for our clients. From understanding the problems that they are trying to solve, to proposing solution options, to breaking down releases and the deliverables in them. But being a strategic partner requires being great at the fine details.

A release can be small and seem to be low-risk, but without the assumptions fleshed-out and necessary work identified and delivered, once that release hits production it can cause all kinds of headaches. Extra time and expense as you troubleshoot, rollback, fix, and relaunch. Not to mention general embarrassment if it is something that could have been avoided by removing an assumption that went undocumented. But more importantly, it causes your client the same pain points, it injects doubt and completely takes the focus off months of good strategic work. If the client's focus shifts enough times from positive to negative, it can be easy to lose your strategic standing with them.

Set your ego aside, spend the time with your team and stakeholders, and squash your assumptions early and often throughout your releases.

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