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# Lessons From the Field

## PART 10: OVERSIZED TEAMS

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Long ago, in a land not so far away, we learned some invaluable lessons around team-sizing that we continue to leverage today. These lessons stem from a variety of different projects and engagements over the years, and for the purposes of this article, I have highlighted the five I feel are most important.

- **Lesson 1: Your magic number.** It is incredibly important to assess your project approach and identify a size cap for your teams. With nearly three decades of experience fielding and managing project teams, we have come to realize that (based on our project approach) teams should never exceed seven members. Teams larger than seven are considered “too big” for how we optimally operate.
- **Lesson 2: Clear planning.** The goal of planning is to ensure that all team members know the goals and objectives for the engagement; their responsibilities

and who they are dependent on. Regardless of your development process, doing this with a large team is difficult and often leads to poorly understood requirements, loosely defined tasks, and not much thought for dependencies.

- **Lesson 3: Team coordination.** This includes both internal team and cross-team coordination. We make a point to coordinate within our teams every single day. This activity can become incredibly time consuming and lead to poor results if the team gets too big. Even on larger projects, instead of having everyone in the room at once, we use team-level coordination meetings to keep large gatherings to a minimum.
- **Lesson 4: Start less, finish more.** The larger the team the harder it is to complete the committed work. This is often because with large teams, members are not always able to collaborate on the highest priority

stories. This leads to a scenario in which we get a lot of stories started but few get done. A quote our teams hear me say quite often is: "it's better to complete one story, than to start three".

- **Lesson 5: Engagement.** As the issues above become more prevalent, team members can lose their sense of ownership and fail to commit fully to the success of the project. Given our commitment to the success of every project, team ownership and commitment is key to our success. Be sure never to lose that engagement!

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