



White paper

## **Into the great unknown**

Project unknowns can kill your project schedule

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Scoutwest, Inc.

## Into the great unknown

What percentage of time do you normally assign for unknown tasks during initial product development? Asked another way, when you create a project schedule for a product release, how much time do you assign for forgotten tasks and tasks with unknown qualities. If you don't assign any, then your schedule will be short. Many of the projects I've worked on were scheduled this way. Developers were asked how long they think the features would take, and a Microsoft Project schedule that included those exact estimates was created. Problem is, engineers forget certain tasks, and forget to mention that they aren't quite sure what's involved in others. That makes the schedule short.

Let's say you were building a new house and forgot the closets. That would have a huge scheduling impact. Either the bedrooms would need to become quite a bit smaller or the house would need to be rearchitected to accommodate them. Home developers don't forget things like that, but product developers do it all the time. Rework and new architecture always results from mistakes like that, not to mention scheduling shortages.

The table below offers my own rule-of-thumb estimates for the percentage of forgotten tasks, and tasks with unknown elements, and how this can affect scheduling estimates. The percentages represent unknowns at the beginning of the phase. As a project progresses the number of unknowns shrink, and the schedule accuracy increases.

<b>Project phase</b>	<b>Unknowns</b>	<b>Scheduling error</b>
Requirement gathering	50%	+60%, -10%
Detailed design	30%	+40%, -10%
Architecture	25%	+30, -5%
Feature implementation	20%	+20%, -2%
Final testing	10%	+10%, -0%
Final release	2%	+2%, -0%

## About Us

Scoutwest, Inc. develops and publishes project management and time tracking products for consulting, manufacturing, government, and general business applications.

Thousands of small to large businesses, in dozens of countries worldwide, trust their mission critical business processes to Scoutwest products. Standard Time® and Standard Issue® work together to offer well-rounded project management solutions.

We specialize in packaged software for timesheets, project management, time tracking, defect tracking, and issue tracking. Standard Time is a web-based timesheet that also runs on Windows, Palm OS, and Pocket PC. It can be used for client billing and task management. Standard Issue is used for bug tracking and general issue tracking.

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