

Scope Creep Vs. Scope Discovery

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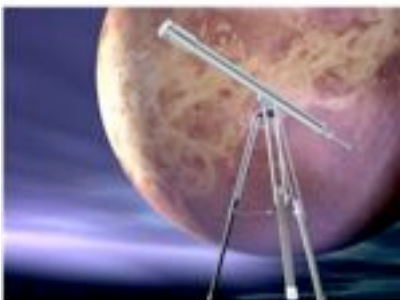
When managing a project, sometimes the [project manager](#) will work additional items into the project plan. When this is detrimental to the project, it is called "scope creep." When it helps to further define the project, it is often called "scope discovery." It can be difficult to tell these two different states apart. Read on to find out how each is defined, and then how you can tell whether your project exhibits a case of scope creep or scope discovery.

What is Scope Creep?

Scope creep occurs when large, irrelevant and unplanned changes take over a project. For example, if my project is to bake chocolate chip cookies, scope creep occurs when I decide to add butterscotch chips, peanut butter, and pecans to my batter. What I wind up with is cookies that are over-packed with flavor and where those flavors potentially clash. [Scope creep needs to be carefully managed](#) and should be avoided if at all possible.

Scope creep is often seen as an inevitable part of [project management](#). Naturally, at the outset of any project undertaking, [the project scope statement](#) covers certain specifications, but as the project progresses the statement will become more refined and will contain tasks that were unforeseen. The question arises - is this addition to the scope of the project really scope creep, or is it something else, **scope discovery**?

What is Scope Discovery?



Scope discovery can be defined as additions to the project scope that are helpful rather than harmful. For example, if in my project to bake chocolate chip cookies I add walnuts to the mix, I might be said to be enhancing the cookie. Rather than contributing to a bloating project, scope discovery adds tasks and milestones that are crucial to the success of the project. Scope discovery involves further defining the project scope and tasks in a way that enhances the project.

When Might Scope Creep Really be Scope Discovery?

Sometimes your [stakeholders will write the project scope](#). At the outset of the project, they might only have a vague idea of what will be required of the project. As the project is planned, you might discover that important facets were left out. When you bring this to the attention of the stakeholders, they think of further requirements for the project scope. This goes back and forth a few times. When are these additions scope creep and when are they scope discovery? Here is a general rule of thumb:

If additions to the project scope refine and make the project scope more clear and less vague, most likely you have a case of scope discovery.

If additions to the project scope make the project scope less clear, more vague and more ambiguous, most likely, you have a case of scope creep.

An enlarging scope is a natural part of the project process. You should not panic anytime your project's requirements enlarge. Instead, ask yourself whether you have a true case of scope creep. For example, if you are working on a [software](#) project where the stakeholders defined the project scope as being, "Create a software program that allows users to track time" and the following stipulation arises during the project planning process, "The software should track time any time a file is opened on a computer." This stipulation further defines the project scope, making it a case of scope discovery. If, on the other hand, when you submit this to the stakeholders they say, "Wouldn't it be nice if the program also tracked everything someone ate in a day, and their calories expended," then you may have a case of scope creep.

A final thought: scope creep is often a result of poor communication at the outset of the project. Before beginning the project completion phase, be sure that you have the [scope pinned down](#) as close as possible to the intentions of the stakeholders. This is one of the best ways to avoid the negative aspects of scope creep.

Read more: <http://www.brighthub.com/office/project-management/articles/52724.aspx#ixzz1DbrhN0Sn>