The discussion that we’ve had so far today (regarding organizational structures, company culture, and forms of power) will give you some great insights to your project environment and influences. Those insights will help you lead and manage your project more successfully within those boundaries. But what about behavior as an organizational influence?

The Standish Group has studied project success and failure and they’ve identified some key elements of project management behavior to be aware of. In fact, they’ve classified some of these elements as the Five Deadly Sins in project management. The Standish Group also states that you’re going to encounter these five sins in every project. These will be found in all organizations – healthy and unhealthy. Another thing to note is that this discussion of behavior can include your team, your stakeholders, and yes – even you.

I’ve added this to our discussion today because understanding these behaviors (and being able to deal with them) is an indicator of your leadership and your organization’s emotional maturity. Just remember that it’s a combination of (1) your awareness of these behaviors – and (2) how you deal with these sins that can determine the success or failure of a project. Let’s briefly talk about each one...

We’ll start with Over-Ambition. Now…normal ambition is good – but no sin is more dangerous to a project that over ambition. Over ambition involves you as a project manager taking on too much at once. This occurs when you want to do more than is really necessary and are blinded by what can potentially be achieved. It's important to remember that (with today’s technology) pretty much anything is feasible, but not at the same time, within the same project and on a limited budget.

Arrogance (aka Prestige): Prestige is often (but not always) linked with ambition, and it correlates pretty closely with past successes. So watch out for this when you – or a project team – have recently completed a successful project. This is about you as a project manager (or maybe team members) having an arrogant or overconfident attitude towards team members, clients and/or other managers in the organization. This may involve ignoring expert advice from users or the project team, or demonstrating a superior attitude toward peers, superiors, or subordinates. Actually, this type of behavior is more indicative of a lack of knowledge – or a lack of any interest in history and lessons learned. The line between confidence and arrogance is very blurry – so it’s very important for you to know when a person has crossed the line from self-confidence into arrogance.

Ignorance: Not knowing, and not caring to find out about stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. Ignorance can be found at every level of a project; project management, project members, project originator, end users. Poor understanding of project goals and overall objectives of the business can quickly lead to a project heading in the wrong direction or breaking down completely. Ignorance is often coupled with apathy – in other words, “I don’t know and I don’t care!”

Abstinence (aka Absence): In the context of project management, this is the act of refraining from participation and contribution to the project. Few things can be as damaging to a project as when people expect to influence and be involved in any decisions taken without spending time on it. “We’ll take a look at it once you have developed the first draft” or “Here are our guidelines, but we can’t take part in the process” are two examples of situations that you should watch out for. If somebody wants to influence the project they should be there when decisions are made, not just checking them retrospectively.

Fraudulence: This covers any action intended to deceive or avoid confrontation. Fraudulence can take many forms, such as trying to cover up the real status of the project. It could include low-balling (and by that I mean deliberately
underestimating cost) estimates to get project approval, or perhaps lying because you don’t want to tell the sponsor the whole truth.

That concludes the recorded section of Module 2, and I think we’ve covered several key topics that are important to know about the context of our project…

We can differentiate several organizational structures…along with their positive and negative influences.

We have a better understanding of our organization’s culture…and how/why this plays an important role in project success.

We now know several forms of power…and which are most and least effective.

We even know how to recognize “the five deadly sins” in project management and how they can impact our project.

This information will help you as a project leader to see beyond the technical tools of project management and understand the bigger picture view if a project environment – and how to successfully navigate through those challenges.