

The Top Three Reasons Projects

FAIL



We can all agree that discussing project success is much more enjoyable than rehashing project failure. However, the discovery of project success is often best learned by examining historical project failure. Once you understand the Top Three Reasons Projects Fail you will be better equipped to recognize the warning signs within projects around you or that you encounter.

OK, SO WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE REASONS PROJECTS FAIL?

BLOWN DEADLINES

The reason projects are late is because there is a **lack of project planning, execution and control techniques being used**. Every day people are assigned leadership of projects with little to no understanding of how to manage them. They may take the responsibility to deliver very seriously but their experience and skills are not applicable enough to allow them to succeed.

TASKS - THEY'RE COMPLICATED

Regardless of the reason, the project leaders are not able to identify all the tasks that need to be accomplished to produce all the required deliverables. They do not know how to realistically estimate the duration of the tasks, put them in the order they need to be performed and determine how long the overall project will take. They lack the understanding of how to determine the level of resources required, how to assign tasks to those resources and the priority to give each task so as to minimize the project being delayed. They also do not know how to communicate the many aspects of the project's status and who to communicate it to.

WORKING HARDER AND LONGER

Most importantly though, project leaders do not know when their projects are running late or are not getting the required resources. While this may seem straightforward the project tracking techniques employed by these ill prepared project leads does not make this data obvious. Even if they were able to determine how late the project is running and if they need more resources they are not equipped with any techniques to get the project back on track. The most common solution employed by these unprepared project leaders is working harder and longer. While this is honorable it is not a very effective technique towards delivering on time.

MISSING THE MARK ON STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

The reason projects do not meet the needs of stakeholders (end users, sponsors, people who care) is because there is **little to no rigor for defining the characteristics of the end product**. Individuals on the project team commonly assume that they know what is needed based on their own understandings and beliefs. Rather than communicating with the client they tend to use these assumptions to drive the creation of the end product. It's no wonder they miss the mark.

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

For some reason, we habitually prefer to think that we know enough about someone else's needs rather than taking the time to ask them. Team members have to put their assumptions aside and talk to those who ultimately know what is needed. The questions they ask must go beyond high level desires. They must probe deeper and deeper to reveal the essential needs. Once these needs are uncovered they then need to be confirmed; this requires documenting them in a way that removes ambiguity. Team members must follow specific guidelines and techniques to ensure that what is described are equally understood between project stakeholders and the project team.

This overall process takes much longer than people think. However, without the proper effort and time a project is doomed to deliver unsatisfactory results. This is as much an art as it is a science, but is definitely a skill that can be acquired.

NOT EMBRACING THE END DELIVERABLE

The reason a project's end deliverables are ignored is because there is **little to no attention given to how people might negatively respond to the change brought on by the project**. All projects induce change, and therefore consideration for how people might resist such changes is paramount.

Near the end of a project, the project team has worked for months and is excited to see the fruits of their labor put to use. They are intimately aware of the end deliverable's capabilities and why it was created. This is good for them but bad news for others who are not made properly aware of the purpose and the benefits of the changes being introduced.

CHANGE CAN BE A SCARY THING

Those impacted by the changes are often afraid that they will not be able to learn the new way of doing things and that their job may be at risk as a result. They feel blindsided by the new expectations, environment, and performance standards and get very anxious. This can cause them to respond in extreme ways.

YOU NEVER GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION

Unfortunately, lots of projects fail right at the end when the project team should be celebrating. You can argue all you want over whether it was Will Rogers, Oscar Wilde, or Mark Twain that first said, "You never get a second chance to make a great first impression." But regardless of who said it, it can be the key to making your project results stick. Overwhelming end users with unexpected changes is a sure fire way to destroy the first impression no matter how hard you try to fix things after the changes have occurred.

One way to improve this process is to assign a team member early in the project to analyze its final deliverables; what is changing, why it is changing, and who the changes will impact. Then a strategy can be developed to ensure that those who will experience the change understand what it is, why they have to go through it, and how they will be trained to succeed after the change occurs.

THAT'S IT!

So there you have it. The Top Three Reasons that Project's Fail. No organization can be expected to eliminate project failure completely; nevertheless, by becoming familiar with the reasons, advances can be made to increase overall project success.