

Roadmap to Successful IT Projects

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IT industry projects have poor success rate. Statistics presented by Assay, 2008 states that 62% of the IT projects fail before completion. Factors which define project failure are identified as follows – overspent budget, beyond schedule, incomplete functionalities, poor project stakeholder satisfaction, low quality of work, inability to meet business needs, and poor user satisfaction.

The objective of this article is to explore what are the crucial areas to focus on so that the projects can become successful.

Areas of Improvement

Let us explore the key areas that provide opportunities of improvement. Some of them are:

- (1) **Project Staffing:** A project that does not have the right people and skill-set is bound to fail. Hence, it is essential to staff the project with adequate number of resources with desired skill-set and experience essential to deliver projects successfully.
- (2) **Planning:** A project that is not carefully planned by understanding the complete problem, the business drivers, stakeholder impact and factors related to organization and environment is set to be unsuccessful. Not identifying dependencies or by not doing risk assessment can derail the project. Projects where schedules are incomplete or where team succumbs to pressure from senior management while defining the project plan is also going to fail. Hence, it is essential to plan projects carefully. While it is good to plan, over-planning is not required as it will blow the schedule and budget of the project even before a single line of code is written.
- (3) **Process:** Defining project management procedures and managing project with it helps in tackling projects efficiently. Lack of methodology increases the amount of rework in the project and hence the project is over budget and beyond schedule. However, it must be ensured that focus is not on too much of process. One of the biggest drawbacks of following too much process is that the team becomes rigid. Hence, the team fails to take initiatives to incorporate changes that will make the product better, or create additional value to the product thereby frustrating stakeholders.
- (4) **Requirement Gathering and Analysis:** There are times project requirements are not clearly defined. This can happen when the client was unable to describe the requirements clearly and the team failed to ask the right questions to define the entire scope of the project. Also, at times developers have a tendency to start programming soon without understanding the entire problem in hand. Any requirement discovered at the later stage of the project is costlier to implement. Also, by not capturing the entire requirement, the project may not be able to meet the business needs and fail in the eyes of the business. Requirement gathering and analysis phase is an integral part of the software development life cycle. Greater the accuracy in analysis, higher are the chances for success of the project.
- (5) **Project Management:** Making plans and having processes in place is not sufficient to make projects successful. Complex projects involve thousands of details – if these details are not properly tracked and managed, the chances of failure increases. Also, the business principle called cone of uncertainty states that the risk to a project plan increases exponentially as you go further down in time. Hence, large projects should be managed as smaller projects running concurrently. Having up-to-date information about the status of the project helps in keeping the project in track. Also, problems that become more difficult to resolve at the later stage of the project thereby adding to the cost and timeline of the project should be resolved as soon as they are detected.
- (6) **Scope Creep:** Change requests are inevitable. However, implementing changes however small it may be means additional time and effort. The series of these small changes can easily push the

project behind schedule and cause the project cost to overrun. Also, without tracking and going through the proper change request process, there are chances that stakeholders may not realize the impact these change requests can have on project timeline and cost.

- (7) Stakeholder Management: Stakeholders are important component of the project. A project is bound to fail if interactions with stakeholders are not kept proper. A project where stakeholders do not have clear visibility in the project causes confusion and this leads to lack of support required to successfully deliver the project.
- (8) Risks Management: Every project has some amount of risks involved. If not proactively managed by determining the probability and impact of the risks, and by making strategy to mitigate, avoid, or accept risks, they can have significant negative impact on the project.
- (9) Communication: IT teams at times fail to clearly communicate the cost and effort required to meet deadline – this leads to situation where it is perceived that IT team has failed to deliver. Also, failure of IT team to communicate in the language easily understood by the other side leads to gaps in understanding that leads to cost and time-frame escalation.
- (10) Business vs IT: Projects that are designed to cater IT requirements only may fail in the eyes of the business. Business projects are designed to solve organizational problems whereas IT projects have myopic goal where they deal only with IT requirements. Also, a project is considered unsuccessful if users do not perceive its usefulness and fail to adopt it.

Conclusion

There is no single rule that applies to successful IT projects. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, a project can fail for numerous other reasons as well. However, focusing on areas defined above increases the chances of success of the project. After all, they help in aligning business with technology, leading to a strong project management, and adhering to pre-defined methodology and process.

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Her in-depth knowledge of project management methodologies and domain experience has enabled her to develop business driven IT strategies for successful IT projects.

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