6-1 Activity: Addressing Project Challenges

Joshua Merren

Southern New Hampshire University

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Professor Aaron Tyler

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Several common themes emerge when analyzing failed projects across different industries. One central theme is poor market research and customer understanding. For example, Coca-Cola's New Coke project failed because the company did not anticipate customers' strong emotional attachment to the original formula (Malsam, 2023). Another common issue is overambitious projects without proper feasibility studies. The Airbus A380 project overestimated the demand for large aircraft, failing to consider the infrastructure costs for airlines and airports (Malsam, 2023). Additionally, inadequate testing and rushed implementation led to project failures, as seen in the Iowa Caucus App, where deployment without proper testing resulted in a significant disruption (Admin, 2024). These examples highlight the importance of thorough research, realistic expectations, and rigorous quality assurance to prevent costly mistakes in project execution.

Time constraints significantly impact project success. Many projects fail due to rushed timelines that do not allow for adequate testing and adjustments. For instance, the Iowa Caucus App for election results reporting failed because it was rushed into deployment without thorough testing, leading to errors that caused significant disruptions (Admin, 2024). Similarly, Boeing's Airbus A380 development spanned over a decade, but due to changing airline industry needs, the aircraft was no longer a viable product until it was completed (Malsam, 2023). Proper scheduling and contingency planning are crucial because failing to allocate enough time for project development can result in costly and irreversible mistakes.

Budget limitations often lead to project failures when cost overruns compromise quality and scope. The New Coke project incurred massive losses due to an ill-advised reformulation and the expense of removing old products from the market (Malsam, 2023). Similarly, the Airbus A380 program faced extreme cost overruns, with development costs exceeding $30

billion, making it financially unsustainable (Malsam, 2023). The Iowa Caucus App project, constrained by budget limitations, lacked the necessary testing and troubleshooting before deployment, resulting in widespread system failure (Admin, 2024). These cases show that while financial prudence is required, cutting corners on critical aspects such as safety, testing, and research can lead to project failure.

Despite failure, some organizational responses to failed projects demonstrated strong crisis management. For instance, after the New Coke failure, Coca-Cola quickly responded by reintroducing Coca-Cola Classic, effectively reversing the negative public sentiment and regaining consumer trust (Malsam, 2023). Coca-Cola regained its competitive position in the beverage industry by quickly acknowledging mistakes and pivoting. Similarly, Airbus eventually adapted by shifting focus to more fuel-efficient aircraft aligned with evolving airline industry needs (Malsam, 2023). Instead of continuing to push an unsustainable product, Airbus took the lessons learned and redirected its efforts toward innovations that better suited the market demands. While the Iowa Caucus App failure led to widespread scrutiny, election officials acknowledged the mistake and worked toward improvements in digital voting technology (Admin, 2024). Although the damage had already occurred, officials took proactive measures to enhance future election technology's security, usability, and reliability. Successful crisis response relies on actively learning from failures and applying those lessons to future projects, preventing the repetition of past mistakes.

Organizations can improve responses to project failures by proactively identifying risks and listening to expert feedback. The New Coke project could have benefitted from more in-depth market research that accounted for customer sentiment beyond taste preferences (Malsam, 2023). Rather than focusing solely on product taste tests, Coca-Cola should have conducted

surveys and consumer behavior analyses to gauge consumers' emotional connection with the original product. Likewise, Boeing's Airbus A380 project suffered from a lack of adaptability, as the company continued investing in a declining market instead of shifting strategies sooner (Malsam, 2023). If Airbus had recognized shifting airline industry trends earlier, the company could have diverted resources toward smaller, more fuel-efficient aircraft sooner, avoiding the financial losses associated with the A380 program. The Iowa Caucus App could have been improved by allocating more time and resources for rigorous pre-launch testing and user feedback (Admin, 2024). Conducting multiple rounds of usability testing and risk assessment would have allowed developers to identify and resolve critical issues before deployment. Improving communication channels, fostering a culture of accountability, and proactively addressing concerns can prevent repeated mistakes and enhance recovery strategies.

Early planning strategies can help mitigate challenges that commonly lead to project failures. Conducting comprehensive market research, as Coca-Cola failed to do with New Coke, can prevent misaligned product launches (Malsam, 2023). This involves conducting taste tests, analyzing brand loyalty, assessing customer attachment, and evaluating market trends to make informed decisions before making significant investments. Implementing iterative development with frequent testing, as opposed to the rushed Iowa Caucus App launch, ensures that products are functional before full-scale deployment (Admin, 2024). Incorporating feedback loops, phased rollouts, and pilot testing can help address potential issues early on and minimize failures upon release.

Additionally, organizations should have contingency budgets to handle unexpected costs, preventing financial constraints from compromising project integrity, as seen with the Airbus A380 (Malsam, 2023). Ensuring that financial buffers are in place can allow teams to make

necessary adjustments without compromising essential project components. By prioritizing data-driven decision-making, phased testing, and financial flexibility, organizations can significantly reduce the risks associated with project failures and increase the chances of long-term success.

You can apply strategies from failed projects to improve personal project management practices. First, conducting thorough feasibility studies, as Airbus should have done with the A380, ensures that a project has realistic goals and avoids unnecessary financial risks (Malsam, 2023). Proper feasibility analysis includes evaluating demand, understanding long-term industry trends, and identifying potential infrastructure constraints that could impact success. Second, adopting an agile project management approach allows adaptability and prevents costly last-minute changes. This approach could have saved the Iowa Caucus App from rapid failure by allowing for iterative testing and adjustments (Admin, 2024). Lastly, fostering transparency and open communication with stakeholders helps address concerns before they escalate—something Coca-Cola failed to do with New Coke. Effective stakeholder engagement includes regular feedback loops, comprehensive user testing, and clear communication of project goals and changes to prevent dissatisfaction and negative public perception (Malsam, 2023).

Scope creep occurs when additional requirements emerge beyond the original project plan, leading to delays and increased costs. In the domain of people, unrealistic expectations from executives, as seen in the Airbus A380 project, can derail a project by pushing for overly ambitious features or ignoring market realities (Malsam, 2023). Setting clear boundaries and regularly reviewing project scope with stakeholders can prevent this issue by ensuring that all additions align with business needs and available resources. In processes, inefficient change management practices, such as in the Iowa Caucus App project, highlight the importance of structured workflow adjustments and controlled implementation phases to avoid rushed

deployments and unexpected failures (Admin, 2024). Lastly, feature creep can result in overly complex technology products, as experienced with New Coke's reformulation, which strayed from core customer expectations. Adopting incremental development, focusing on core functionalities, and conducting early user testing can prevent excessive scope expansion while ensuring the final product meets the intended goals without unnecessary complications (Malsam, 2023).

References

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