WHY DO PROJEC

Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.

BY KAREEM SHAKER, PMP

Project failure has always been a hot topic. Yet the mystery behind what drives projects off track is starting to fade. Organizations have come a long way when it comes to ferreting out the root causes of failure.

Here are some of the top reasons projects fall short—and tips for how you can use that knowledge to stop making the same mistakes over and over again:

1. Poor alignment

The right project isn't always the most profitable one, but it does have to align with the organization's vision. If not, a lack of executive backing will most likely doom it. If the project will deliver value to customers and users, though, stakeholder support and ownership should be strong.

2. Bad planning

The old adage tells us, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." The planning stage of the project has to be taken seriously. Project managers must identify key risks, dependencies, stakeholders, and communication and quality needs. Consulting team members and subject matter experts will help ensure the team's buy-in and commitment.

3. Lack of executive support

The gap between project managers and executives has always been there. All too often, a senior manager is made the project sponsor without enough knowledge of the project—or even a basic knowledge of a project manager's role.

Project managers can find themselves alone when it comes to wrestling with project issues, stakeholder conflicts, and lack of cooperation from resource managers, system users, team members and other support departments.

The sponsor must agree to study the project charter and have a full understanding of each and every section. Once the charter is formally accepted and signed, the sponsor should then send a notice asking all stakeholders to give full support to the project manager. This can lead to great results in organizations that are not projectized. Executive support must be continuously given to empower the project manager during all stages of the project and should be on the agenda of steering committee meetings.

4. Incomplete requirements

One issue that haunts IT projects in particular is the high level of uncertainty. To avoid drastic changes during later stages, project managers should follow a robust requirements

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In her post, **"Developing Swift Trust,"** Lynda Bourne, DPM, PMP, explains, "Swift trust occurs when a diverse group of experts are brought together in a temporary organization such as a virtual team created for an urgent project." Ahmad Al-Ani, MD, PMP, commented that project managers "should build (rather than have) such a skill, since many projects are short-term ones involving strangers from outside the comfort zone."

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analysis process and build a consensus among conflicting stakeholders from the start.

5. Unclear expectations

Different stakeholders may perceive a project in different ways, and each has his or her own ideas about its duration, cost and quality. Make sure to set expectations and establish that some deviation is inevitable. Without that step, a key stakeholder is likely to wield undue power and could easily get the project canceled. Throughout the project, continue to anticipate and monitor stakeholder attitudes, demands and actions.

6. Scope creep

Uncontrolled changes can bust a budget. Project managers must institute a robust change-management process that can handle both minor and major shifts. Beware of "gold plating," another form of scope creep, where some extravagant additions are included by a project team in an attempt to indulge stakeholders.

A project manager has to promote a culture of change management and protect the boundaries of the project so it remains consistent with its charter. Ideally, all changes should be assessed for their impacts on cost, time, risk and quality.

7. Lack of resources

The recession fundamentally altered the way organizations work: Projects come with fewer resources, stricter deadlines, higher expectations and smaller budgets. Working in a weak-matrix environment only compounds matters because resources are shared among more than one project,

and the functional manager often defines priorities. To secure resources and gain executive support, project managers should be well-versed in people skills.

8. Choice of technology

With new technology comes risk. Selecting the wrong technology, incapable system integrators and inadequate products can all lead to trouble. Vendors are going to oversell their products, and many project managers have been duped. Project managers and their teams must conduct robust due diligence and demand that vendors present relevant case studies and proof the technology does what the company says it will.

9. Inexperience

Though they're loath to admit it, project professionals themselves can be the main reason projects fail. Some lack education or experience, while others adopt an improper management style. Few project managers will accept accountability when a project doesn't work out—but it's the first step in learning from their mistakes. PM

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