
Unit 3: Estimating, Planning and Risk

Summary Post

Collaborative Discussion 1: Project Failures Study

Task:

Please read the Lehtinen et al. (2014) paper and then answer the following questions:

- Question 1: What do you believe are the three most common reasons for project failure?
- Question 2: Give two examples of failures that support your choices (there are several examples in the lecturecast).

Answer:

In this discussion, we explored the multifaceted causes of software project failures, guided by a thorough analysis of the key literature and real-world examples. Drawing on insights from Lehtinen et al. (2014), we identified poor communication, inadequate resource allocation, project complexity, and mismanagement of user needs as critical factors contributing to project failure.

Communication has emerged as a pivotal aspect, where the lack of clear and consistent information flow can lead to significant misunderstandings and misalignments. This was exemplified by the Healthcare.gov rollout, in which insufficient communication between stakeholders led to a disastrous launch. Implementing regular meetings and using collaborative tools can mitigate these risks.

Resource Allocation was highlighted as another crucial element, as demonstrated by the FBI's VCF project. Failure to allocate skilled personnel and sufficient funding resulted in unmanageable delays and eventual abandonment. Effective resource management, including regular planning and continuous adjustments, is vital for project success.

Project Complexity and Environment can also complicate project execution, as illustrated by Denver International Airport's baggage system. The chaotic project environment and unrealistic timelines have led to significant technical issues and, ultimately, project failure. Simplifying processes and fostering a supportive environment are essential for managing complexity.

Finally, the **Mismanagement of User Needs**, as shown in the case of Windows Vista, can severely impact a project's success. Failure to understand and address user requirements leads to widespread dissatisfaction and poor adoption. Robust requirement-gathering processes and change management strategies are crucial to ensuring that the final product aligns with user expectations.

Discussions and feedback from peers underscore the importance of a project manager's role in addressing these factors through proactive leadership, fostering communication, and continuously adapting to project challenges. Integrating these lessons into project management practices can significantly enhance the likelihood of successful software deliveries.

References:

Lehtinen, A., Mäntylä, V., Vanhanen, J., Itkonen, J. & Lassenius, C. (2014) Perceived causes of software project failures – An analysis of their relationships. *Information and Software Technology* 56(6): 623–643.