Determinants of Project Success

Having a talented project manager is the first step to actual project success, but there are other important factors that contribute largely to a project's outcome. It takes careful planning, attention to detail and effective communication to make a project succeed. With vigilant management and a strong project closing, a company can consistently reach project success.

1. Smart People

Without the right team in place, any strategy and plan has the potential of completely falling apart. Because of this, the core project staff, expert resources, suppliers and all stakeholders should be part of the team dynamic. All of those involved must have commitment to the group, share similar visions for the projects and strive for overall success.

Project managers can face serious trouble if inadequacy is present within the team. Inept leadership or an out-of-sync team can send a project towards failure. It is important to assign the right people to each aspect of the project and make sure that they are working well together. Additionally, the entire team should be completely informed and involved in order to have the most successful outcome, which means that communication has to be on par.

Use a software tool to get everyone online and using a central repository of information. Tools like Copper Project not only allow you to manage the To-Dos and Project plans, but will also allow you to set the availability of your resources, and then book their time on specific tasks/projects. Once they've logged their time, you have a powerful system that not only automates time-sheets/invoicing, but stops your project processes falling apart when your staff move on.

2. Comprehensive Planning

Having a detailed plan sets the ball rolling in favor of project success from the start. The team and the stakeholders of the project should always know from the beginning in which direction the project is heading. Comprehensive planning can help the team to meet crucial deadlines and stay well organized.

There are many benefits of smart planning. This starting step in the project allows a realistic time frame to be created. It gives accurate time for cost estimations to be produced and also helps in clear documentation of milestones and deliverables, which will make things much easier as the project progresses. Planning details the resource requirements and acts as a warning system. If there is any lapse, then the warning system will provide you a clear visibility of what to expect.

According to 'Learning legacy: Lessons learned from the London 2012 Games construction project', the scale and complexity of delivering venues and infrastructure for London 2012 Olympics drove a program structure of around 50 individual projects. A high level of detailed planning was developed in 2007 which defined scope, specifications and initial budgets across the entire program which helped to complete the construction of London 2012 Olympics. Each project was also required to provide detailed information on budget position, progress and other aspects on a monthly basis which facilitated in-depth reviews and an integrated program overview. In fact, the program management of this major sporting event which had many sub projects helped to improve standards of practice across the UK construction industry.

3. Open Communication

Looking closely at details and listening to outside sources of information is vital to the success of a project. Keeping open communication within the team is absolutely essential. When working under a specific timetable, it is important that the team remains well-informed. If a problem arises on one part of a project, it can negatively impact other parts as well. Communication is the best way to prevent problems from occurring.

Communication should also be focused internally within the organization. Keeping an organizational history of major projects will give convenient access to improved policies and business processes. If this isn't done, then a team may repeat mistakes that have already occurred. Listening to stakeholders and paying attention is a very important ingredient for success.

Good communication also includes knowing when to say no. A project team should never promise anything they know they can't deliver. Saying no in the beginning could save an

overabundance of unnecessary problems later. Always be honest about what your team can do and when it can be done by.

Aside from using a tool that allows draggable timelines, also find one that allows you to use previous projects as templates for establishing your new timeline. Not only will you improve your processes over time (becoming more accurate with your estimates and setting client expectations accordingly), but you also improve communications between all your project participants.

4. Proper Risk Management

It is a known fact that projects do not go exactly as planned. Some projects fail and some fail spectacularly due to risks that arise during a project. According to PMI's 'Pulse of the Profession: The High Cost of Low Performance', organizations today are losing USD 109 million for every billion spent on projects and programs. Create a risk log with an action plan to tackle those risks that arise during the project.

As a project manager, make sure all the stakeholders are well informed about your risk log and where can they find it. Even if something happens, your team can resolve the problem in an efficient manner with the plan already set in place. This gives the team confidence when facing project risks and helps the customers feel secure with their project's progression.

5. Strong Project Closure

If a project does not have strong closure, then it has the potential to continue to consume resources. The project team must be firm and agree with the customer that all critical success factors have been met. Confirmation of the project delivery, testing, and release must be agreed upon and signed off. Satisfaction surveys are good forms of documentation to log and file for future reference and valuable information for use in the future.

It is the project manager's job to ensure that everything runs smoothly on a project, but having a great project manager doesn't guarantee a successful project outcome. The entire team paying attention to key factors is what will help lead the project to true success. This success will then lead to proactive, organized project plans and an increase in quality of all future projects.

5. Team Motivation

A motivated team will go the extra mile to deliver a project on time and to budget. Keep your team motivated by involving them throughout the project and by planning frequent milestones to help them feel they are making progress. Communication is key, so let your team know when they are performing well, not just when they are performing badly.

6. Saying No

Believe it or not, some project managers and some team members come to that, have a problem saying no. Never promise anything you know you cannot deliver, you are just storing up problems for later. Stick to your guns no matter how senior or important the person is, they'll thank you for it later. If they don't, perhaps you're in the wrong job. When saying no, be firm and ready to justify the reasons behind your decision.

7. Project Closure

Remember that projects have a finite life. A project that isn't closed will continue to consume resources. It is in the customer's interest to keep the project open so they can add new features and functionality as they think of them. At the end of the project be firm, agree with the customer that the Critical Success Factors have been met, the project delivered, tested, released and ask them to sign the project off. I like to use a Customer Acceptance Form that I lodge with the Project Office. At this point, you may like to ask your customer to fill out a satisfaction survey. They may have valuable information that can help you and your team improve for future projects.