

5 Tips for Successful Projects

By Matthew Sheaff

On a regular basis we are constantly reminded that an overwhelming majority of projects are completed over budget, past the desired deadline and outside the original scope. Best practice project management reminds us that if we successfully initiate, plan, execute and close out our projects - our metrics will illustrate greater results. However, there's more to project management than just a simple methodology. With this in mind, here are five simple tips for completing this challenging process and improving your project outcomes.

1. Know and Understand the Purpose of your Project

This first tip sounds simple. However, far too often I've gone into organisations or talked with project managers and asked them, "Why are you undertaking this project?" Their answer is predictable - "Because so and so told me to." The ability to understand why your project is critical to your organisation's mission and how it fits into the overall strategic plan is a key component to its success. Being able to relate the success of your project with overall organisational goals and strategies is an easy way to increase team member dedication, morale and a sense of importance. Also, understanding the purpose of the project or hearing how it ties into the strategic plan shows executive level buy in for the project. Further, if a project team gets consistent senior level support, they are more likely to have the adequate resources they need to complete the project and thus successfully complete the initiative.

2. Maintain a Clear Grasp on Reality

A lot of times, organisations take on major projects that get all stakeholders really excited and anxious. For example, building a new baseball ballpark or opening up an international office in London. In situations like this, it is very easy to let all the excitement and the emotions cloud judgment and thus it's hard to have clear, realistic expectations for budget, schedule or scope.

3. Make Sure Roles and Responsibilities are Clearly Defined

A football team is successful only when each member on the field successfully fulfills their specific responsibilities and strategies, so too in project management. Each stakeholder plays a specific role and key role in the overall management of the project. Defining each member's role and responsibility is one of the first steps for success. I've provided a chart of the basic roles and responsibilities of project stakeholders below.

Stakeholder	Responsibility
Project Manager	Manages project, creates project plans, creates various management plans related to the project, measures project performance, takes corrective action, controls project outcomes, manages project team and report project status
Project Sponsor	Executive who initiates and oversees the project. Serves as advisor to the project manager
Functional Managers	Responsible for completing project activities and producing deliverables
Customer	Provides project requirements. Approves project deliverables and verifies that they meet requirements
Project Team	Responsible for completing the activities of the project
Suppliers	Provide goods or services to assist project team in completing project

4. FULLY Utilise your Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

The work breakdown structure represents the hierarchical view of the project, detailing out the major deliverables to be completed in a chronological and easy to view format. [Hint: create your WBS with post it notes on a flip chart or whiteboard to easily shift around deliverables and create the perfect flow for your project.] However, most project teams do not get total value out of their WBS. Not only is it used for completing estimates on the project schedule and duration but it is a great tool to assist in project cost estimating and the budget process. Since the project is broken down into smaller parts, it is more accurate and easier to budget by deliverable and then add those estimates up for a more accurate project budget proposal.

5. Project Management is Not a "Fire Extinguisher"

Out of the five tips that this article has described, this one is by far is the hardest for organisations to actually practice. Project Management is not a "fire extinguisher" for when the project is sinking faster than the Titanic. It's not the great panacea used to combat the faulty planning that was performed. Instead, project management is a concrete methodology that must be used organisation wide. Failure to use best practice project management in all organisation projects regardless of size and dollar value will only result in poor performance. Finally, project management is only as good as the people who execute it, and the people who execute it are the people who hear and learn about it. Demonstrate the value of project management to your senior level management and get them to buy into the methodology - that's the only way to guarantee improved and lasting results.

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