



Reasons Why Projects Fail

In a perfect world, every project would be “on time and within budget.” But reality (especially the proven statistics) tells a very different story. It’s not uncommon for projects to fail. Even if the budget and schedule are met, one must ask “did the project deliver the results and quality we expected?” True project success must be evaluated on all three components. Otherwise, a project could be considered a “failure.”

Have you ever seen a situation where projects begin to show signs of disorganization, appear out of control, and have a sense of doom and failure? Have you witnessed settings where everyone works in a silo and no one seems to know what the other team member is doing? What about team members who live by the creed “I’ll do my part (as I see fit) and after that, it’s their problem.” Even worse is when team members resort to finger-pointing. Situations similar to these scenarios point to a sign that reads “*Danger*.” And if you read the fine print under the word “*Danger*” it reads, “your project needs to be brought under control or else it could fail.”

When projects begin to show signs of stress and failure, everyone looks to the Project Manager (PM) for answers. It may seem unfair that the burden of doom falls upon a single individual. But this is the reason why you chose to manage projects for a living! You’ve been trained to recognize and deal with these types of situations.

There are many reasons why projects (both simple and complex) fail; the number of reasons can be infinite. However, if we apply the 80 / 20 rule the most common reasons for failure can be found in the following list:

Poorly managed	Undefined objectives and goals	Lack of management commitment
Lack of a solid project plan	Lack of user input	Lack of organizational support
Poorly defined roles and responsibilities	Inadequate or vague requirements	Stakeholder conflict
Team weaknesses	Unrealistic timeframes and tasks	Competing priorities
Poor communication	Insufficient Resources (funding and personnel)	Business Politics
Overruns of schedule and cost	Estimates for cost and schedule are erroneous	Lack of prioritization and project portfolio management
Scope Creep	No change control process	Meeting end user expectations
Ignoring project warning signs	Inadequate testing processes	Bad decisions

Even with the best of intentions or solid plans, project can go awry if they are not managed properly. All too often, mishaps can occur (and usually do). This is when the Project Manager must recognize a warning sign and take action. If you understand the difference between symptoms and problems and can spot warning signs of project failure, your training will help you take steps to right the ship before it keels over. Yes, it's the PM's responsibility to correct the listing- no one else. In addition to applying the processes and principles taught in Project Management class, you can also use your personal work skills of communication, management, leadership, conflict resolution, and diplomacy to take corrective action.

During the course of managing a project, the PM must monitor activities (and distractions) from many sources and directions. Complacency can easily set in. When this happens, the process of "monitoring" breaks down. This is why the PM must remain in control of a project and be aware of any activity which presents a risk of project failure. Yes, this is why "you are paid the big bucks."

About the author:

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