



How to Determine if Your Project is in Trouble

Five Critical Success Factors for Project Success

Whether you're developing a strategic plan, undergoing accreditation, or implementing an ERP system, institution-wide projects and initiatives require a strong foundation to be successful.

You have set your goals and created timelines for your project. You have leveraged your stakeholder buy-in. You have developed a detailed budget that accounts for every last dime. So what could go wrong?

Anything and everything. Even the best planned projects will encounter problems along the way. These hurdles however, do not mean that your project is doomed to failure. The key is to identify these challenges early and take the appropriate steps to get your project back on track.

Critical Success Factors for Project Success

We surveyed our top project managers to compile the following list of five of the most critical factors for successful project completion.

- **Budget**
- **Scope**
- **Schedule**
- **Teamwork**
- **Communications**

These five factors are highly interdependent, and a problem with one or more of them can be like a crack in your home's foundation. A crack in the foundation could lead to a crack in the wall. A crack in the wall could lead to the eventual collapse of your

house. A problem with one or more of these success factors could signal your project is at risk.

To help ensure the success of your projects, you should continually monitor and manage these factors. In this article, we have highlighted several signs of trouble within each factor and identified steps you can take to address these problems before they cause your project to crumble.



A crack in your project's foundation can bring down your chances of a successful implementation and completion.

BUDGET

Getting off budget is one of the fastest ways to get your project off track. This fact is true regardless of whether you are over budget or under.

Spending too much too soon might mean that your funds may run out before the project is complete.

On the other hand, spending too little too late may be an indicator of other problems like missing deadlines.

One way to measure where your project is relative to the budget is by looking at budget consumption – the amount of budget you planned to spend divided by the amount you have actually spent. Compare that

number to the percentage of your budget that you planned to spend. If the difference between the two percentages is between -10% and 10%, you are on probably on track. If not, you need to find out why.

Possible reasons include training sessions that have not taken place as scheduled, consultant visits that did not occur as planned or specific target dates that were missed.

Solutions to Managing Your Budget

Careful monitoring and regular reporting are crucial to effectively managing your budget and avoiding problems. However, if problems occur, begin by determining the reason your budget is off. Then pull your team together to discuss options for getting your project back on budget.

If you've already spent too much, review what tasks have yet to be completed and consider what items might be truncated or eliminated completely.

Regularly monitor your budget.

If you're under budget, review the task list and determine what has yet to be done. Look for items that could possibly be combined that can bring you up to speed. For example, if you're behind on training, consider adding additional sessions per week, until your team is caught up.

When it comes to your budget, the sooner you identify and address potential problems, the closer you can keep to your project schedule and the more likely you are to successfully complete your project.

SCHEDULE

Frequent changes to your project's schedule are clear signs that your project could be in trouble. When tasks are not completed on time, scheduled go-live dates may have to be pushed back, additional funds may be needed, and you may be asked to change the overall scope of the project.

Solutions to Managing Your Schedule

Careful monitoring and regular reporting are crucial to effectively managing your schedule and avoiding problems. However, once you notice that your project is beginning to get off schedule, gather your team to explore your options.

First, determine why you are off schedule. Do you lack resources? Is your team's workload too heavy? Perhaps team members are still unclear of their duties.

After you identify the reason, the solution needs to be efficient and effective. You may want to re-evaluate deadlines and possibly submit a scope change request.

By exploring all of your options for getting your project back on schedule, you are more likely to find the best solution. However, it is critical to always keep in mind that steps taken to address schedule changes may have a big impact on the other key factors in making your project successful.

SCOPE

Scope addresses the overall goals or deliverables of the project. Too many change requests throughout the course of the project may indicate that your project is experiencing scope creep.

If your project is off budget or off schedule, you are likely to see scope change requests to compensate. Some teams attempt to make up for missed deadlines and incomplete tasks by using time allotted for future assignments. Or they use newly identified budget concerns as a reason to change the overall scope of the project.

Solutions to Managing Your Scope

In order to keep scope changes from putting your overall project in trouble, consider the following:

- Ensure you have a strong scope and change management plan
- Communicate the plan and the processes to all stakeholders
- Evaluate change requests more thoroughly
- Prioritize requests and move lower priority items to a second phase
- Explore alternatives to the scope change with a business process change

Managing scope creep is a critical component for project success.

TEAMWORK

One of the biggest factors in determining the success of a project is how well project teams and team members are working together. Nothing will wreak more havoc on a project than teams experiencing problems and low morale.

Classic symptoms that indicate teamwork problems include team members not attending team meetings, team meetings being regularly cancelled, constant finger pointing between teams and team members, and team members showing high levels of stress.

Solutions to Managing Teamwork

Many teamwork problems can be effectively managed from the beginning of your project through communications, teamwork and meeting skills training, and identification of needed skills and resources. However, if you find teamwork issues after the project has been underway, several activities could help.

First, celebrate interim project successes. Long-term projects have many challenges but they also have a lot of successes. By celebrating each success, team members get a sense of accomplishment and validation for their hard work.

For team meetings, add variety to your agendas, find creative ways to make team meetings more interesting, and use your successful meeting tools to make sure that meetings effectively use your team members' time.

Finally, you may need to reset the tone and reiterate the vision of the project. Remind everyone of what the successful completion of the project will bring to the institution and bring back the enthusiasm that was present at the beginning of the project.

COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communication throughout the lifespan of your project will help keep your project on track. However, often in the midst of the work of a project, communications efforts take a back seat. People are busy, and they forget to ensure that communications are occurring regularly and that they are reaching the right people.

Solutions to Managing Communications

Developing a detailed communications plan for your project will help you manage communications from the very beginning.

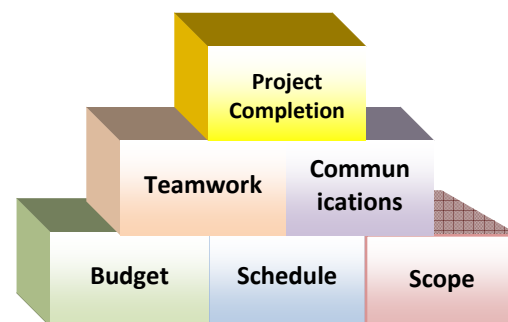
Using effective communication tools such as meetings, websites, newsletters, memos, and announcements will keep team members aware of what progress has been made and what still needs to be done.

One of the best ways to get your project communications back on track is to revisit your communications plan. Communications are also important when addressing roadblocks. Team members need to be able to clearly understand what challenges are standing in the way of success and, within the appropriate venue, be free to voice their thoughts on possible solutions.

Open and effective communication can reduce frustration and resentment and keep the whole team moving towards the same goal.

Five Critical Success Factors for a Solid Project Foundation

Budget, scope, schedule, teamwork, and communications; when these five factors are firmly in place your project will have the foundation it needs to be the success you and your team have worked so hard for.



A solid foundation will help ensure your project is completed with success.