

Where Do Projects Go Wrong?

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I am going to let you in on a little secret. There is one area on which few projects spend the appropriate amount of time and all projects should: communication.

Now, you might be thinking to yourself that this is a ridiculous comment because on projects we are communicating all of the time in meetings, through email, on the phone. Have you ever been on a project where you got towards the end of the project and one of the stakeholders delays further work because they were unsure of the direction of the project? What about dealing with a multi-facility implementation where employees at different facilities have a different expectation of what is being delivered? How about implementing a fancy new software system only to find out that the way the system works will not support the daily operations of the business that purchased it? I am sure that most if not all of you have experienced something like this.

It is very easy, and in fact necessary, to say on every project that communication is going to be the key to a successful completion of the project deliverables. But do we really give it the attention it deserves? Do we spend the time to develop a communication strategy and determine what mechanisms can be used? Do we spend the time to do a detailed stakeholder analysis to determine who the stakeholders are, what influence they have, what message they want to hear and how often? Do we then turn that information into a detailed communication plan outlining what we are going to say to whom, how often and in what format? And once we have gotten that far, do we assign responsibility to another/others to ensure that the communication plan gets executed, and then follow-up to ensure that expectations are being met? I think you can guess what my answer will be. Most projects do assign communication a high priority, but once deadlines are being pushed back and workload is increasing, communication is the first thing that falls off the radar screen.

It is one thing to communicate; it is another thing to communicate effectively. The best PMs are not the ones who communicate the most, but they are the ones who communicate the best, and get everyone else to buy in to and communicate their message.

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