

Why Project Measurements are a Waste of Time

Written by Andrew Miller

Everyone! Take 30 seconds and think about all the different measurements that one can use to evaluate a project's success or failure. Here are a few to help you out: percentage complete; total budget savings; earned value; achievement of milestone dates; all requirements met; number of sites implemented; number of people trained; increased compliance, etc.

What do they all mean? Squat. Diddly. Zero. How can any of these measurements tell you whether or not the project is being run successfully? They cannot because you have nothing to compare against. It sounds like a great success story to say that 250 people were trained or that the program was rolled out to 50 sites, but what if there were actually 500 people that needed to be trained or the program needed to be rolled out to 100 sites. Makes a successful project look a lot worse doesn't it?

This is the part where everyone is supposed to say that we need measurements in order to track progress and the success of the project. Why? Why do I need to track the hours it takes to perform every task? Should it matter that it was completed successfully or that it took 7.5 hours to complete? Why is that the measure of success? Ahhhh, right - BUDGETING. (I will save this topic for next month)

Now you say, well Andrew, if you are so smart and do not need these measurements, what do you use? I do use measurements, but in a typical PM scenario, you have no control over most of the decisions, so make sure the measurements do not reflect poorly on the project, when the project has no control over the decisions. Just because an organization decides to make a bad decision or a vendor decides to play hardball, why should the PM be penalized by missing deadlines? Then the project becomes "red" (oh no, not red!!!).

I prefer to look at what objectives the project is tracking against. What does success look like for the project sponsor? What will be the impact on the organization? These are questions that we as PMs should want to know, since we are responsible for the "successful" completion of the project.

Should the objective be to implement a new system at five sites in six months; or to provide access to technology for users at five sites that will reduce their administrative processing time by 25%, thus making them available for more value added activities?

You be the judge!

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