

Twelve Necessary Steps to the Success of Your Program or Project By Eric Gioia

Whether you are managing a large program or a single project, you are responsible for its success. You ensure success by managing risks in the areas of schedule, cost, communication, change control, and many more. Executing the following 12 steps will help your projects run more smoothly. Though these are basic elements, few project managers consistently apply them to their projects.

1. Gauge project complexity.

Many projects start without full stakeholder understanding of their complexity and size. As the project progresses, the true scope emerges. However, it is often too late to adjust resources, budget, and delivery date. A true understanding of a project's complexity will enable the development of well-designed and detailed management plans. These plans require that each project task and discrete work elements be fully evaluated and documented.

2. Facilitate internal communication.

As organizations implement their project plans, they often fail to communicate them effectively. Communication is paramount to project success. Everyone associated with a project needs to fully understand the project goal, their individual roles, and how their actions affect the project. Most major projects fall outside an organization's core business, so the project manager may not have access to critical information that will affect the project. Without this information, the project manager is working in a vacuum and the project will fail. To overcome this typical organizational issue, the project manager must constantly communicate project goals and status to senior management and involved business managers. While the project manager may not have the authority to control the actions of others, information will allow him to proactively manage external influences. Full and fluid communication will mitigate *unforeseen* issues caused by uninformed individuals.

3. Integrate key elements.

Successful project management is no longer limited to managing a schedule. Project managers need to integrate key elements – cost control, configuration management, and resource allocation – to deliver the project on time and on budget. These are intertwined inextricably in every project. For example, a delayed schedule means cost overruns, or a seemingly simple requirement change can negatively affect schedule and budget. By integrating these elements, project managers can understand how changes in one area can affect another, and manage the project accordingly.

4. Instill measurable controls.

Although many believe that a completed project is the chief measure of success, this is not necessarily true. Throughout the project life cycle, there needs to be milestones with metrics to measure the outcome. Every project has a final, desired outcome and metrics quantify crucial parameters in a meaningful manner. Examples of meaningful metrics include delivering a product to market faster by cutting weeks off the process or delivering a product with fewer operational defects. Metrics enable objective evaluation of project success with bottom-line measures instead of subjective interpretations.

5. Understand requirements.

Requirements creep is one of the leading causes of project failure. To control this, project managers need to thoroughly understand the desired outcome, available resources, and required delivery timeframe. Base-lining requirements at the start of the project are critical to success. Once the Statement Of Work (SOW) has been developed, the project manager is responsible for managing the project accordingly. The project manager needs to carefully review the addition of requirements or changes that affect the original SOW. As a project moves away from the original SOW, it is difficult to deliver against the original requirements, making the measurement of success impossible.

6. Develop implementation strategy.

A project can have many resources and still not be successful if the resources are not integrated into an implementation plan. Developing an effective implementation strategy is key to project success. Unfortunately, many organizations invest time and resources to develop a sophisticated plan only to put the plan on a shelf.

- 7. Monitor project holistically.**

Many organizations rely on software tools to manage their projects. This is a strategic flaw. Tools can be used to help track a project, not run it. Software reports can provide valuable insight into the collection of data, development of meaningful metrics, and monitoring of the implementation strategy. Project managers need to monitor their projects from a holistic point of view including data reports, communication with key players, and earned value management.
- 8. Align customer and contractor expectations.**

The project manager and end customer should agree to deliverables and overall project goals. As a team, they should share a single vision for success. The project manager must make sure that he/she is aligned with customer expectations. If this does not occur, the customer will most likely be dissatisfied with some or all parts of the project. This defeats the project manager's most basic goal – customer satisfaction.
- 9. Cultivate a win-win attitude.**

A win-win attitude occurs when the project manager and end customer cooperate to achieve the stated project goal. A lose-lose situation develops when a customer who takes little interest in project progress, out-sources it to a contractor who approaches it as a repeatable revenue stream. Customer reliance on a contractor to deliver while providing little oversight can cause the project to self-destruct. A win-win attitude will minimize conflicting interests and focus efforts on the project.
- 10. Formalize project management discipline.**

Many organizations do not have the expertise in-house to effectively manage large, complex projects. For an organization to deliver successful projects, the knowledge, discipline, and facilitation of project management must be instilled. These skills can be developed internally by instituting an intensive, project management education program or by contracting with an external firm to provide mentoring resources.
- 11. Emanate leadership commitment and sponsorship.**

Senior management must make project success a broadly communicated priority throughout the organization. Most organizations respond when leadership emphatically communicates its commitment to issues. For projects to be successful, individuals at all levels of the organization need to remain sensitive to the needs and priorities of the project. The project manager must have a charismatic approach to laud project benefits and be able to motivate and inspire those working on the project and those affected by its results. Otherwise, the project goals and successes will not be known across the organization and its true value will be questioned.
- 12. Approach projects as a start-up business.**

Any new project is a large undertaking. Budgets need to be carved out, resources assigned, control systems established, management determined, and goals aligned with enterprise strategy. For these reasons, projects should be viewed in the context of a start-up business. Typically, a project is viewed in the context of an existing project. As a result, resources and budgets are spuriously linked to the detriment of multiple projects. For example, a firm installing a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system may decide that it needs to upgrade the existing financial system. These are two independent projects; however, they are related to each other. Each needs its own resources to be successful. Without independent resources, the project may fail.

Implementing these fundamental steps is crucial to delivering a successful project on time, on target, and on budget. What do you need to do to ensure that your projects are successful? First, carefully evaluate the existing status of your project. Has every one of these 12 steps been implemented? Second, review how the steps have been integrated into the project. Are there areas where the project could benefit by improving a step? Finally, continue to evaluate your project according to pre-established metrics. If you notice delays or budget issues, verify that one of these steps to success has not been compromised.