

Top five reasons to get any project into trouble



Often the same omissions and mistakes prevent the desired project success. In particular, the importance of the interpersonal and organizational aspects for project success is frequently underestimated. In the following, the top five reasons are presented, which in many cases can hinder a project or even cause it to fail.

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1. Unclear or unrealistic objectives

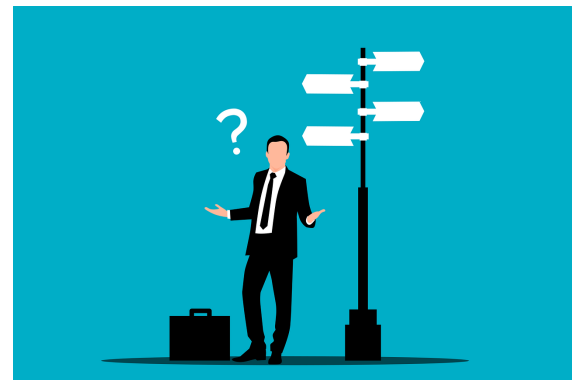
Usually at the beginning of any project, a several project-specific objectives are defined. The biggest mistake that can be made at this stage is to keep the objectives too unclear or to set unrealistic targets.

The consequences of unclear objectives are, for example, inefficient project organizations, i.e. either too small or too large project teams. In the first case, this leads to delays in a project and thus usually to a loss of money or even to the failure of a project. In the second case, costs are too high.

Unrealistic targets put a project and the staff involved under a lot of pressure right from the start. Unrealistic targets are usually the outcome of being too ambitious. Either in terms of time or in terms of the project goals to be achieved.

Usually such a situation has a demotivating effect on the project team. This is because they will usually not be able to achieve the goals set and will face a constant pressure to justify themselves. Normally, in this situation, many employees lose the fun working on a project and the willingness to perform becomes lower.

The reasons mentioned above, show the importance of thinking intensively about the definition of objectives at the beginning of a project. The objectives should be clear in terms of both content and time requirements and should be ambitious but still achievable.



2. *Project team does not correspond to the project task*

Another serious mistake in the beginning of a project is to set up a project organization that does not correspond to the tasks to be solved. It will have a particularly negative effect if the operative project team is staffed too weakly. In the case of a project organization that is too strong, costs will be too high, but apart from that, there should not be any negative consequences for the further course of a project.

In practice, of course, one often encounters the case that a project team is not sufficiently staffed. Of course, especially in smaller and medium-sized companies, it is not possible to assign special staff for every project who concentrate 100 % on the project work.

Generally, employees assigned to a certain project are expected to solve their additional tasks in parallel to their everyday work. In this context, it is easy for project staff to find too little time to get involved in a project or not to be particularly motivated because they see the project work mainly as an additional burden. This can especially be the case if employees are involved in several projects at the same time.

Especially before the start of larger projects, it is worth to consider whether employees involved in a project should receive a project bonus in addition to their normal salary. An additional monetary incentive usually increases the motivation to achieve or even exceed project goals.

Furthermore, it is better to assign more staff to a project than too few. This means dividing the tasks of a project into more sub-areas and defining smaller tasks accordingly. Consequently, you lower the chances to overload the project staff from the outset. This helps to control a project more precisely and in a more targeted way. At the same time, however, the control effort for a project also increases.

Additionally important is to consider in advance which areas and groups of people inside your company will be affected by a project or its objectives. This is important for the decision on the composition of the steering committee. You should invite representatives of all areas accordingly.

3. *Internal animosities*

A company does not always agree on how various project goals can best be achieved in detail.



This is particularly the case when it comes to larger projects involving different functional areas.

Then you sometimes find yourself in a situation where different criteria play a role in a decision for the different specialist departments. For example, user-friendliness can be a decisive criterion for new software for a department, while integration into the existing system architecture is seen as the number one priority for the IT department.

The attitude of each department is understandable, but of course, tensions can easily arise in such situations and, of course, project delays. Therefore, you should end this state as soon as possible.



At the beginning of a project, you should consider early on which path to take in order to quickly reaching an agreement on controversial issues. For larger projects, the steering committee, to which the project management reports, is suitable for this.

The project sponsors sit on the steering committee, i.e. those people who ultimately gave the impetus for a project, as well as other areas of the company directly or indirectly affected by a project. Therefore, it makes sense to make such decisions within the steering committee. However, the chair of the steering committee should have been appointed for this purpose, which makes a decision after consultation. Otherwise, discussions could also arise in the steering committee, which would lead to delays.

Another point to consider in larger companies are concurrent projects. Of course, tensions can also arise here, since different projects sometimes have to fall back on the same specialist staff and additional bottlenecks can arise there. It is also possible that there are overlaps in different projects with regard to their goals. This can also lead to tension. It is therefore very important to recognize such conflicting goals at an early stage or to identify all projects between which there could be overlaps and to fill the steering committee accordingly.

4. *Insufficient communication*

Good communication is a cornerstone of a successful project. Right from the start, all employees whose work environment is directly or indirectly affected by a project should be informed in advance about the time horizon and the basic goals of a project. This is an important step, because when the employees feel informed, there are fewer fears and resistance to a project.

This communication clearly also includes those involved in other projects. In larger companies in particular, you will find different projects running in parallel. In this case, various difficulties may arise. On the one hand, this can lead to significant additional workloads in sub-areas of a company, and on the other hand, it is possible that the goals of individual projects are not entirely consistent, at least in the short term.



Everything should be done in advance to prevent such situations from arising in the first place. Therefore, one of the core tasks of project communication is to identify all projects that could overlap and to communicate with the relevant project managers.

During a project, communication between the project members, the project manager and the steering group is very important. While the exchange between the individual members of the project team and the project manager is about operative information, the communication with the steering committee concerns information about the progress of a project and the provision of decision templates.

Of course, there are now a large number of software solutions providing good support in this phase of a project. They offer shared databases on which all information relating to a project can be stored and exchanged, tasks can be assigned and the processing status of sub-steps can be updated.

Even if they make work a lot easier, such tools are far from sufficient to ensure the success of a project. The human component is always decisive. The project manager has the task of motivating the project team and recognizing difficulties at an early stage and then eliminating them.

Of course, no tool can take over these tasks. What matters is what information is entered there or how high the quality of a solution actually is. Ultimately, the project employees involved and the project management are responsible for this. The project management is therefore at the center of the communication work, which is why this function is crucial for the success of a project.

Regular and transparent reporting on the status of a project to the steering committee is just as important as keeping communication within the project team clean and open. There should be no gaps in information at this point.

5. *Lack of transparency*

A lack of transparency in the data will of course be a serious problem for many projects. On the one hand, this means a lack of transparency about the progress of the project; this point has already been dealt with under the heading of communication.

As mentioned above, there are various software tools available today to increase and simplify transparency within a project. Otherwise, you can also set up your own developments relatively quickly based on standard business software in order to ensure good transparency of the project progress.

Of course, no tool replaces the commitment of a project team. Not even the direct communication between the project manager and the team. Otherwise, difficulties in achieving a project's goals and adhering to the schedule are very likely. The responsibility for this lies with the project management.



A lack of data transparency as a risk for a project also implies the situation in which a thorough and sufficient analysis of the initial status is not possible because internal company data is either not available or is in different IT systems and must first be laboriously merged.

Of course, newer cloud solutions can also offer a relief here. Nevertheless, in many projects, especially when it comes to optimizing processes or results, you often encounter a situation in which the data is unclear or even incomplete or incorrect.

It is clear that such an initial situation leads to delays in a project or to wrong decisions. A lack of data transparency as described here is a consequence of past omissions. Therefore, every company should attach great importance to constantly developing its ERP systems and checking the quality of the inserted data.

The more transparently the status or the starting position can be displayed and the less time this causes, the more efficiently a project can be set up and implemented. Conversely, the lower the data transparency, the more time is lost and the higher the risk that the project goals will not be achieved or not in the originally planned period.

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