

The Root Causes of Success of Technology Projects

Background

Most technology projects take longer than expected, cost more and don't deliver what is expected. For survey data see [here](#).

However some, it may be as [few as 16%](#), are successful.

We believe it is time to discover the causes of success in those projects that do succeed. If there are common causes, knowing them will help future projects be successful.

Summary of Appreciative Interviews about Successful Technology Projects

The **root causes of success** are "soft". They are about the management of the project.

1. Arrive at the contract between supplier and customer via exploration, testing, conversation and **dialogue**. This builds mutual trust.
2. **Broadcast** your successes as you go.
3. **Communication** is critical for the success of projects. To do it well enough takes time, imagination, thought and planning.
4. Create a strong and supportive **team** that meets regularly and talks openly. If possible make sure the core team is small.
5. **Commitment** from everyone involved is crucial. This takes time and frequent and detailed conversations.
6. **Engage** with the key people very early on in the project. Involve everybody as it progresses but encourage them to keep things simple and focus their energy.
7. Find **outstanding** people, they exponentially increase your chances of rapid progress.
8. **Focus** on getting the job done and disregard cultural, hierarchical or bureaucratic barriers. Make and use informal contacts to get things done.
9. Give people the opportunity to **learn** about and test the system before it goes live.
10. Have a **champion** or champions for the project. Make sure they always know what is going on.
11. Have a clear, agreed and intrinsically meaningful **goal** for the project. This is worth the time and detailed discussions it takes.
12. Have a skilled and experienced **project manager** with the authority to manage the project.
13. Have resource limits and deadlines that make people use their **imagination** to meet the goal.
14. Have some **margin** for requirements that change, as people understand more clearly what the project requires. See change as inevitable and an opportunity to be smarter.

15. IT may have the idea but it essential that the **business** sees the benefits and **owns** the project.
16. **Learn** rapidly from successes and problems. Use your learning for the present project and later ones.
17. Make sure you get buy in from everybody involved by actively **listening** to and responding to their concerns and suggestions.
18. Maintain constant and open **dialogue** between all the stakeholders in the project.
19. **Test** concepts in a small way by demonstrating them first.
20. Make sure everybody knows what their **role** in the project is and how their job will contribute to the success of the project.

Results

These root-causes lead to successful projects, which happen on time and to budget, work and make or save money. You reported feeling **fabulous**, vindicated, relieved, excited, pleased, marvellous and "drunk" when you achieved success.

It is very surprising that although these conclusions appear obvious and none desperately difficult, still only 16% of technology projects succeed. We are still not sure why this number is so low. However, one thing was quite clear from all the people who participated in our small study. All of you **wanted your project to succeed** and had this as a personal priority.

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