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STRATEGIES

A NEW DIMENSION TO EXCELLENCE

FREE!

Revealed...
the single
biggest
cause of

**PROJECT
FAILURE**

This shouldn't really come as a surprise to anyone, but I can guarantee it will! Virtually every IT project failure is NOT actually attributed to a technological shortcoming...

Incredibly, the main reason is ... Communication, Communication, Communication - or more appropriately the lack of!

The Problem:

Despite what you might think, or possibly the explanation you've been given for a project failing, in the vast majority of cases the underlying cause is **poor** or **inadequate communication**, both verbal and written. Find this hard to believe? Then read on.

There is a secret thread that runs through virtually every reason causing IT projects to fail. The list of reasons is virtually limitless. More often than not they can be attributed to one of the following – lack of end-user involvement, unrealistic time scales, poorly defined (or worst case) no requirements, ineffective change control and unsuitable testing.

However, on the flip side, there is a vital and key ingredient to every successful project. A common thread that runs through all of the phases, activities and tasks – **effective verbal and written COMMUNICATION.**

More often than not this is down to the project manager and his or her ability to communicate effectively with the rest of the project.

Sadly throughout the rocky and turbulent landscape that is IT there remains a lack of appreciation of just how important communication is. Also the many shapes and guises it comes under and the potential pitfalls associated with this lack of appreciation.

Failure to communicate effectively throughout your project's lifecycle brings with it an uncharted minefield littered with a lethal cocktail of ticking time bombs.

These potential showstoppers can manifest themselves in the shape of dangerous and unagreed assumptions, poorly defined requirements, unidentified risks or issues festering under the surface likely to explode when least expected or wanted.

Even when a project fails due to a technical glitch this can usually be put down to a breakdown in communication somewhere along the line. This stems from a basic lack of understanding or explanation between your technical colleagues and your end-user or customer.

It is a shame but unfortunately, you as the poor old project manager, usually bears the brunt of a project's failings and alas this is no different I'm afraid.

IT Project Failure – When Will We Ever Learn?

It comes with the territory and should be a vital component in the project manager's armour. Like it or not, the PM should have overall responsibility for communications throughout the lifecycle of the project.

Invariably the standards of communication and chances of your project being successful are set in the early days. If the relevant individuals and channels are identified in these early stages you are well on the way to running a successful project.

There is a number of detailed reports widely available based on valid comprehensive research describing the main causes for projects failing. Projects naturally produce many new challenges along the way, but is seldom the root cause attributed to a failure.

Time after time after time projects fail due to poor communications often with individuals, departments or divisions working in silos, disparate groups working in ignorance of each other.

The Bull survey in 1998 reported that 57% of IT projects failed due to a breakdown in communications.

More recently, the KPMG report published in November 2002, established that the main cause for IT projects to fail that year was down to *poor project management and poor communication.*

The Solution:

If your project is to be delivered successfully you must make sure you and your colleagues communicate effectively. This won't happen overnight but you can start by leading the way, setting the standards and showing how it should be done.

What is the biggest most important factor of you being an effective communicator? *The art of listening!* Take onboard what you have been told, digest it and if necessary process it.

Far too often people miss key information because they simple aren't listening properly. They're tuned into the infamous Radio WIII FM (What's In It For Me). They're only listening to their own personal frequency and not the frequency of the project in general - often the unofficial emergency channel! This is where you can add your weight in gold by "hearing" information that others innocently miss.

Proper communication is not just a one-way street it's two-way and preferably with two lanes on either side! Information of all types be it ideas, facts or data must be shared in an open, forthright and honest manner with all of the groups involved in your project.

This is not just a theory, I have personally experienced this many, many times before and witnessed the positive results and benefits this approach brings.

IT Project Failure – When Will We Ever Learn?

Instantly improve your project's communication. My favourite motivational poster has been around for sometime now but never fails to impress. You may well have seen it. There are a variety of pictures that feature in the poster but the words they always remain the same.

"Communication is the key to success – Pass it on!"

You are the one person who can bring all of this together, the lynch pin – the project manager. You are the one individual who is perfectly placed to make sure the right people get the right information at the right time.

Nobody is saying this is an easy task either! Do not expect an abundance of recognition from everyone because it may not happen. You will get recognition from those that understand and appreciate good communications, but as we have already identified there aren't too many of those around to appreciate your skills! You need to be preaching to the unconverted as well as the converted.

Do this and you will be well on the way to steering your project through the turbulent stormy seas to the calmer waters of success. This will then be reflected in your CV, your company's track record and undoubtedly make a significant contribution to a successful career path for you.

Below are five areas that will make an immediate impact on your project. It is by no means definitive, but hopefully will give you a head start and prompt you in to thinking of other important areas.

1) It's good to talk! Check, Clarify, Confirm, Verify and Validate.

Always remember, in the words of that famous BT advert, "It's good to talk". Despite all of the advanced tools we have available these days to solve our problems and deliver our solutions we still cannot get away from the fact that we need to talk. If in doubt then Check, Clarify, Confirm, Verify and Validate. Make sure everyone understands the plot and is reading from the same script.

2) Identify your key First Points of Contacts (team leaders etc.)

These will be the most important people you communicate with during the course of your project's lifecycle. They're the key personnel from other areas of the project that you'll deal with on a day-to-day basis. They probably report directly to the key stakeholders / sponsors (who will not necessarily want to be bothered on a daily basis) and should relay the information you provide.

3) Clear and accurately defined business requirements

These always seem to be a source of issues and problems. They need to be clearly and accurately defined and reflect the business needs. Make sure the business team are fully signed up to these. They must fully understand and agree with what you are going to deliver. Equally all of the suppliers need to be comfortable and confident with what they're providing. If not then identify and agree a compromise with everyone.

4) Hold regular and well attended meetings

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Often these start off well but eventually fade. Hold weekly meetings, preferably face-to-face, to track the project's progress and discuss any problems. Make sure all your first point-of-contacts attend consistently or send a suitable representative. Use an action tracker to monitor the actions generated. (Not to be confused with tracking progress of your project plan related tasks). Categorise the actions into "Open", "On Hold", and "Closed". Make sure everyone agrees to the Who, What, When detail.

5) Management reports, day-to-day updates, ad hoc status update

I will guarantee that someone somewhere will always be wondering what the current status of the project is. You only need to update the colleagues on your key players list, i.e. your first points of contact. They can cascade, as they feel appropriate. Just make sure they know what's expected of them. Providing you send out a weekly project status report, ad hoc updates for the good (and bad) headlines and brief daily updates as and when necessary, then you won't go far wrong. Don't forget to check with individuals that they are up to date when you see them next. If you show interest then hopefully so will they!

So why then, despite all of the evidence, do we continue making these fundamental mistakes?

The average person isn't blessed with an abundance of natural communication skills; we need to work at it – constantly. It doesn't come easily and is not everyone's top priority to work on.

Because of this, the age old root cause of IT project failure will continue to weave its subtle spell, wreaking havoc wherever possible.

Projects will continue to fail until this is addressed (unless of course you, your company or organisation are one of the chosen few blessed with the art of communication). **It's down to YOU – act NOW!**

What can YOU do? Depending on the scale of your challenges and problems, you may need to do more than the suggestions outlined above. You could invest in the consultancy services of an expert, a specialist who can improve your whole communication process throughout your IT project. Whatever the cost of the consultancy, it must be viewed as an investment, not just as an expense. It will easily provide savings of hundreds of thousands, even millions of pounds.

Why Endeavour Strategies? Why Me? I offer an initial **free consultation**. We'll explore the possibilities of working together and decide whether it's worthwhile moving on to the next stage. This can be done over the phone or a meeting – the choice is yours.

Visit <http://www.endeavour-strategies.com>

Working together you'll benefit from my proven track record and unique blend of technical and managerial experience and knowledge gained from over thirty years and three successful careers in IT, Retail Management and the Royal Navy.
