

KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

Written by Jenny Feliciano, MBA, PMP



Project managers must plan for and manage project implementations with clear objectives, an effective management strategy, and a process for clear and timely communication. The planning stage is critical for strategy development but in most cases, it is the stage that project team members want to rush through. Diving into a project without adequate project planning can lead to scope creep, insufficient project resource, poor communication among project team members, and subpar deliverables.

CLEARLY DEFINE THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Success of the project is measured by the project team's ability to meet the project's objectives. Two important tasks that must be completed before the project officially begins are: (1) develop a scope statement that describes the overall project and (2) develop quantifiable success criteria that will be used to determine the success of the project.

A scope statement should be concise and describe the results of what will be implemented. Often times, project teams define success of the project based on a process instead of a result. For example, instead of stating, "Implement changes in the eligibility system," the scope statement could state, "reduce the number of steps required to determine member eligibility" or "increase the accuracy of eligibility determinations".

In order to determine if a project was successful, clear goals, objectives, and standards must be defined at the beginning of a project. Upon completion of the project, these goals, objectives, and standards will be used to determine the success of the project from the stakeholders' perspective. Success criteria can be related to project management or be defined based on deliverables. Project management criteria measure how successful the project manager was in the business of project management. An example could be "ensure project status report is delivered to leadership within the first five days of the month".

Deliverable-based success criteria are linked to the specific project and what it is attempting to achieve. Using the eligibility system example from above, some examples of deliverable-based success criteria include, "ensure 95% of eligibility department staff are trained on system changes two weeks prior to implementation of changes" or "reduce eligibility determination errors by 50%".

START OFF SLOW AND TAKE TIME TO PLAN

The project planning stage which consists of developing the project roadmap to achieve the project's objectives and establishing the framework and tools for managing the project consumes the most time of all the project stages. It is normal for project teams to want to jump in and start completing tasks, but it's important to understand that anxiousness at this point in the project can lead to ignoring factors that may impact the project's success. When the project gets going, it is more difficult to influence the project, so allow for sufficient time to define the scope of the project, set expectations on stakeholder involvement, identify dependencies and project risks, develop a project schedule that is realistic and reflects input from the project team, and develop a communication plan that addresses exchange of information during all phases of the project. This is also the perfect time to set up best practices for the project. People have the tendency to bring old behaviors into new projects and that may not always be a good thing. Spend some time discussing how project team members should interact and collaborate on the project.

CREATE A PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY COMMUNICATION

Project managers spend more than half of their time on communicating information about the project, including solving problems, sharing ideas, getting information, and producing project documentation, plans, reports, and agendas. One way to help increase project team members' contribution in communication is by developing and sharing a well-written communication plan that explains project team members' roles in the communication process and how the information they provide is used. For example, project team members that are required to provide weekly status updates to the project manager should understand that the information they provide must be timely and accurate because it is (a) used to inform other project team members that are working on dependent tasks and (b) used to develop a project status report for leadership review.

Communication plans do not have to be lengthy and complex. A simple communication matrix may suffice in most cases. Identify the purpose of the communication, the messenger, the frequency, and the medium. That's it. The key is to engage project team members in its development to establish a deeper understanding of the importance of accurate and timely information in the communication flow process and make it available to the project team.