Project Success - Interestingly, many organizations cannot answer the question of what a successful project should or would look like, or more clearly, many cannot answer the question as it relates to their own project. Considerable time may be spent developing a comprehensive project plan, a plan that may even include certain deliverables and other outcomes, but the idea of what a successful project should look like is frequently not identified. Before moving ahead, it is worthwhile to explain briefly the opposite of project success, project failure, and the rate of project failures. Gartner, one of the world's most respected analyst firms, estimates that 66% of large scale projects fail to achieve their stated business objectives, are delivered late, or are substantially over budget. It's the overlooked question, successful project management, what does it look like? Defining project success seems simple — deliver on time and on budget. But are those really the success factors most important to your customer, the project sponsor? Isn't it more important that the project deliver tangible business results? Consider for a moment, your project is delivered on time and on budget, and all deliverables fell within the original project scope, but the project ultimately was not deemed a success. This is an important point, so let us go a little deeper.

It's Not All About Process - As mentioned in another essay, "what is a project", many consider a project and project management to be synonymous with a process, and therefore successful project management must be the result of an effectively executed process.

Yes, one of the many tools successful project managers employ is an effective process, however clean execution of a process is only part of the solution. So let's roll back for a moment to the definition of a project and further evaluate the following statement, "a project is defined as a problem scheduled for solution". Now, without spending considerable time discussing and defining what a problem is, and what a problem is not, let's look at this from an organizational perspective. Organizations have, or at least should have, a strategic plan that outlines such things as strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. A strategic plan will outline an organizations short and medium-term goals, how the organization intends to grow, and how the organization intends to overcome challenges. This is where projects are born.

Business Drivers - Delivering a successful project starts with taking a step back and understanding business drivers: business drivers are the problem or opportunity that precipitated the project. One common method an organization uses to evaluate performance is by establishing and evaluating key performance indicators (KPI's). KPI's often represent the starting point for a project in that an organizational goal may be intended to effect change along some key performance indicator.

SUCCESSFUL
project management

Continued From Previous Page - When identifying the need for project and then subsequently developing the project scope and plan the organization's business goals must remain a focus throughout the project. It is a reconciliation process on the frontend, during project need identification and planning, where project goals are specifically aligned with organizational business drivers.

Ideally, before any project planning begins, the project sponsor/ customer would provide a well thought out list of project goals and success criteria.

Unfortunately, this is frequently not the case, and it is up to the Project Manager and project team to help the customer define the true project goals; what are the drivers behind this project and what is the desired outcome? It may take some effort to identify clearly these business drivers but without them, your project runs the risk of failure. Wrap your mind around this for a moment, your project is successfully executed but because it is not aligned with organizational strategy, the project ultimately is considered a failure. You, the Project Manager, must work proactively on the front end of the project to help the organization truly identify the desired project results.

Project Success Guidelines to Live By - Spend real time and effort asking the project sponsor the following questions. The answers to these questions are your project success guidelines, so make sure you obtain complete clarity at this point, it will make a big difference later on.

Probe, push, prod, seek specific answers, use the five-why's, and whatever other strategy makes sense to identify the root cause to known challenges and the desired solutions to go with them.

1. **What does project success look like?** A specific reduction in fixed costs, a specific reduction in variable costs, an identified increase in sales, an identified increase in productivity, more of this, less of that, what is it – what does project success look like?

2. **What organizational goal is the project intended to fulfill?** What is the driver, the metric, the change or improvement sought that correlates to a specific organizational goal, find out?

3. **How do we know the project is complete?** Big question, what is the business "landmark" that tells us the project is complete? Going a little deeper, have the organizational goals been met, if not, the project may not be complete.

4. **Finally, how will all this be measured?** - Be specific, some number, some percentage, some ratio,… what will be measured and how will it be measured?

PERFORMANCE
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