

The 5 Most Common Mistakes That Plague IT Projects

At its core, IT project management's objectives are to mitigate risks and safeguard predictability. Simply put, the idea is to make sure the project goes as intended.

But given the challenges of juggling costs, time constraints, security risks, thin resources, obsolete technologies, and more, this is no easy task – no matter what project management strategies are used. Even though projects are meticulously planned out using ideal hardware and software, the right amount of resources, and reasonable timelines, there will likely be unique challenges with nearly every IT project.

While no two IT projects are the same, there are common project management mistakes that can hinder progress regardless of unique characteristics. If made, these mistakes can cause a project to run outside of its intended scope, and ultimately, to fail. Here are five of the most common mistakes that plague IT projects, and how you can avoid them:

1.

Unclear Goals and Objectives

Few projects will be greenlit without being tied to some kind of strategic objective. In order to achieve that objective, it's critically important that the goals are well-defined, and that everyone involved clearly understands their responsibilities, assignments, and deliverables. While this is important at the start of a project, it can be even more important in real time. As a project progresses, existing objectives could be modified, and additional objectives or goals may be added.

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Poor goal-setting can derail even the most carefully planned projects. This can occur when there is a lack of consensus regarding a project's direction, when there is a change to requirements, or when an unplanned risk must be dealt with.

- ✔ To establish clear goals and objectives, kick-off meetings that include key decision-makers and stakeholders can help define expectations and build consensus. Additionally, you can ensure all goals meet the SMART criteria (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely), and you can also use similar historical projects from the past to better manage goals, or to recalibrate them if they've previously proven to be unrealistic.

2 Poor Communication and Collaboration

With the high-level collaborative and productivity tools readily available today, poor team communication and collaboration is hard to excuse. Team communication is a fundamental part of successful IT project management.

Without appropriate feedback from key project teams and stakeholders, projects can sit idle for days or even weeks without progress being made. If your teams and leaders aren't effectively communicating with each other, the entire project can easily fall apart.

- ✔ Utilizing well-suited project management software can make collaboration, task visibility, progress tracking, and team communication easier for all involved. While regular meetings are useful, they can also take away from valuable work time if they occur too often. Team workshops are also a good way to help drive collaboration and timely completion of goals.

3 The Juggle Struggle

Changes are inevitable in IT projects. Even with the most well-planned, things change. As the project advances, other priorities can influence the workflow, discoveries can be made that can alter the direction, unforeseen challenges or risks can cause resource changes, and more.

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Each time a modification is made, it has an impact on another aspect of the project. A seemingly simple change can impact the schedule, which can then impact the budget, which could then lead to additional risks, and so on. The management of an IT project is a constant juggling act of complexities, complications, and difficulties – all of which could send a project off the deep end if not handled well.

- ✔ Learn to juggle. And embrace the challenge of adapting and adjusting.

4

Lack of Necessary Data Reporting

With all the complexities that come with an IT project, roadblocks often occur with a fair amount of regularity. In many cases, they can be avoided if key decision-makers and stakeholders are given a heads up, and have time to react. This can be done through regular data reporting that's full of pertinent and necessary information.

A report including data such as a brief historical record of changes, milestones, estimated vs. actual finish dates, open issues and risks, high-priority problems, associated mitigation steps, and more, can help keep projects on track by avoiding delays and setbacks from surprise roadblocks.

- ✔ While it can seem like an unimportant step, make this a priority and create a status report with the decision-makers and stakeholders in mind - using visualization whenever possible, and keeping it short and to the point.

5

Inadequate Scope Creep Management

Small changes can often lead to massive shifts in a project's goals. Scope creep occurs when goal and objective additions are made that are beyond the

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originally intended scope. Scope creep not only slows projects down, but it saps team morale, causes budget overruns, and can lead to a puzzling nightmare if not properly managed.

No matter the size or complexity of the change, scope changes cost time and money – both of which are typically in short supply.

- ✔ You have your scope of work before the project begins. Stick to the plan as much as possible and keep an eye on every change request. If you're asked for a change to the deliverables, offer explanation as to why it's out of scope and the correlating cost impact of making the change.

No matter which tools and processes you use, IT project management mistakes are easy to make. By keeping an eye out for these common missteps, you stand a better chance of achieving successful project completion.