

The 10 Most Common Mistakes in Project Management

1. **Waiting too long for decisions!**

This is the most common fundamental error! This happens because people feel that waiting will provide more information for a better decision. Waiting makes decisions harder not simpler!

This means that delays let your competition out-run you and pass you by. Decision delays will put your company in a “catch up” mode and time will end up working against your goals.

Making early and effective decisions will maintain or put your company in the lead.

In the majority of cases, time is your enemy!

2. **Moving too slowly!**

This is the “ready aim – aim – aim” mode of management and must be avoided at all cost, because it will cost all! Projects must start and proceed and finish, not start and wait!

Your company is never more ready to progress than when you pull the trigger and start. A slow process is a dead process for innovation and efficiency. If people have excuses for not starting the project change process, the eventual change will be much more difficult and risky.

Realistically, your people, processes and technology environment will never embrace major or even minor changes without a clear path, methodology, and leadership that do not accept project “death by a thousand delays”.

“Getting ready” is not the same as “getting going!” Organizations do not need consensus to proceed, just consensus for goals. Speed to value is critical to success.

3. **Little Methodology for Projects!**

Without a well defined Project Management methodology for tracking people and progress, any task is fair game for failure. Without project control and visibility with serious follow-up when needed, your project money is being thrown to the wind, along with deadlines, usability, cut-over commitments, etc.

4. **Lack of defined outcome or strategy for change**

The concept of process mapping and defining the “where to from here?” is an absolute must in projects and change management. The idea of “the project is complete” when the technology is done, is a recipe for complete disaster on budgets and people acceptance.

Major changes need major design for each aspect of a corporation’s resources – people, processes, and technology. Without the three legs of the project, the balance is lost for future efficiency.

5. **Measure the wrong things to determine success**

Too often, projects and change cause duress, stress, and mess in the corporation. This is the basis of change, and must be expected. If you measure the “morale feelings” as project negative, then you aren’t looking at the cause of the issue, you are looking at the symptom that is brought about by change.

Trust in the organization is not always shown as trust in change, although the changes driven may be the exact direction needed for corporate health. Inclusive communications and measuring the true goals of the change will take discipline which is not always present when corporate buy-in is fickle. If you have a defined outcome, measure to the defined results.

6. **Keep people in the dark, and don’t train for the new organization.**

This is perhaps the most often violated project change management set of tasks. The “They will know it when they see it.” attitude means you don’t know what you are building and don’t know what is needed of your people when you are finished. Change means new learnings are necessary, and that means new

training. Leaving your people to “learn it as they go”, means bad habits, work-arounds, poor auditability, and poor acceptance. Teach for success at cut-over, not 6 months later.

7. Don't worry about the people issues. They will look after themselves!

If people are not sure of the effect on them personally, they won't accept the change as positive. Change is a threat and lack of information becomes a trust issue that will be very hard to overcome after the fact. If the project or change “story” is developed from fear rather than well developed change management at the individual level, the project will be doomed and sabotaged.

Ambiguity breeds worst case scenarios in people's minds.

8. Failure to incent your people to bring change about successfully.

Existing systems are known and accepted. New processes, organizations, and roles, need new incentives for employees that make sense. Not changing incentives that are appropriate for new systems and processes means effectiveness is lost and resistance is increased.

9. Useless communications

Good communications to your employees does not mean just more communications. Daily report sheets and useless non-information meetings are worse than no meetings at all.

Good communications means honest discussions with the right people at the right time. Too often the message is targeted at “feeling good” vs. straight talk. Make every communication session an open, honest exchange of information, not platitudes that automatically cause distrust within the company. Keep credibility as the highest goal and be honest.

“It is what it is!” means it doesn't work!

10. Lack of leadership

Because Charlie did a good job changing out the photocopiers, doesn't mean he will do a good job changing core processes and the people organization.

Excellent results require excellent leadership and leaders. Change is a hard animal to drive, and projects have distinct rough spots that require leaders to act differently. Start, middle, and finish of projects and change management have different skills needed and different approaches.

Insure your leaders are up to the task or have excellent support to drive results to completion. Things will get confused, ambiguity will happen, and resistance will appear.

Build your leader skills to handle these “mushy parts” of change, and you will achieve the goals needed.