

## **Ten Steps Toward More Successful Projects**

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Have you ever been asked to lead a project to fix a problem, implement a new technology or some other initiative? It can be intimidating. Just because you, yourself are a good problem-solver, doesn't mean you have the capacity or drive to work with a team to achieve a goal.

Often the secret to success lies in up-front preparation. Here are ten things you can do to help assure that when the project is done, it will have the effective results your leadership team is looking for.

### 1) Talk to the Stakeholders

Identify the folks who live with the pain and pay the price because of it. Talk to them about what they'd like to see as a result of the project. If they feel like you took the time to genuinely listen to them about their struggle, they'll do everything they can to support your team and give you the resources you'll need to carry out your objectives.

### 2) Get the Right People

If your team has people who already have other projects they are involved in, be honest with your boss and tell him or her that it's unrealistic to pick the same people over and over for project teams. Pick people who know about the process where the PAIN is. These subject matter experts will be much more efficient and effective in leading you to the real causes of the PAIN. Find the people who really care about the quality of their work.

Find people willing and able to work together in a cohesive manner, on a common goal.

### 3) Be Ready to Lead

Leadership is about walking the talk. You'll have to behave in a way that demonstrates the qualities you seek from your team. Clearly communicate expectations, leverage the unique qualities of each team member and give them the tools they need to succeed.

### 4) Define the Business Process Involved

Of the hundreds of processes, inputs, outputs and deliverables in your organization, which one is the focus of the team?

#### 5) What is The Scope of the Project?

Where does your focus begin and end. What things are in the scope and what things are out of scope? Defining this up-front keeps ideas and tasks that come up along the way from derailing your team from the main objective.

#### 6) Make a Project Charter

A Charter is a game plan for your project. It includes Project Title, Team Members, Enablers, Challenges, Milestones, Customers and their Critical to Quality Characteristics (CTQs). What product or service characteristics does the customer (internal or external) really care about?

#### 7) Current State of the Process

How is the process now performing, based on the measures and metrics available? Are there measures and metrics available? This may end up being part of your team's deliverables. Look at cost metrics, quality metrics and delivery metrics.

Map it out with pencil and paper. You don't need a lot of technology to get a few process knowledge experts in a room with some sandwiches and a few hours to see how you do the work you do.

#### 8) A Problem Statement

A problem well define is half solved. The problem statement should describe the PAON associated with the poor-performing process. It includes who receives the output of the process, what performance is expected from the process, what performance do you now see from the process, what is the extent of the poor performance.

Don't use the Problem Statement to identify pre-determined solutions or root causes. Don't include the names of people working in the process or steps your team will take to solve the problem.

## 9) Go Gather Data

Even though there is an intuitive, qualitative sense of where the PAIN is, it's best to quantify the issue. Here is an example of a problem statement, after some data is gathered:

The number of ICT failures of the ABC Engine Control on line 3 increased significantly in Q1 of 2009. The average failure rate in Q4 of 2008 was 3.34%. The average failure rate YTD is 8.12%. Every one of these failures requires rework and the root cause of some of the ne failures has not been found at test.

## 10) A Business Case

Here we define the financial impact of the process problem. Don't be afraid to sit down with your comptroller and hash out an estimated cost of what the process problem represents to your organization. You may have to haggle a little over pay rates, direct or indirect terms, annual salaries, but it will get you talking to someone who will benefit from the improvements your team makes.

You're making him look better to the boss, so remind him of that and leverage it in getting the answers you need to make your team a financial solution, not a nuisance.

Estimate the cost of a failure, the quantity of failure and predict what it's costing the firm to manage the problem. Make an educated guess about how much of this issue your team can attack and call that the cost-avoidance your team can achieve.

Can your team solve half of the problem, a third of it? You probably won't find the cause of the entire issue, so be conservative. It's better to delight your management team and exceed expectations by underestimating how much of the issue you can solve. There are always hard-to-assign causes in every process. Focus on improvement, not perfection.

When you're ready and you've done your homework, kick off your project. You won't be entirely in control of everything but you've done a great deal

to make it work. Accept the unexpected along the way and have fun.  
Embrace the chance to develop some new skills. Good Luck!

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