

IT Projects in the 21st Century

Research has shown that approximately 70 percent of IT projects fail. The British Computer Society (BCS) in its April 2004 e-Bulletin has reported that, at best, only 16% of IT projects can be considered truly successful. These failures do not only cost money spent for these projects, but may, as well, cost the business opportunity of an organization. These surveys goes on to reveal that majority of these failures are somehow, not due to lack of technical knowledge of those managing projects or project team members in their field of expertise, but rather due to lack of business skills and effective project management techniques.

The BCS e-Bulletin says “The study report points to ‘the general absence of collective professionalism in the IT industry’, ‘inadequacies in the education and training of customer and supplier staff at all levels’, and ‘a broad reluctance to accept that complex IT projects have many similarities with major engineering projects and would benefit from greater application of well established engineering and project management procedures’.”

Information Technology is here to stay and has greatly affected and will continue to affect almost all business activities in an organization of various types and sizes. Most IT developments activities in an organization can actually be categorized as project. It may be an installation of IT infrastructures such as LAN/WAN, wireless networks; in-house software development; or an implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution, to name just a few. All these activities can be characterized by its project-like nature, and may effectively be managed with project management methodologies.

This article is hoped to contribute or instill knowledge and invoke hindsight to programmers, system developers, engineers involved in IT projects, IT managers, and all other stakeholders in IT development activities.

While it is not possible to discuss in complete details here the concepts and processes of the various methodologies of project management, this is, in somehow, meant to cover some of its important concepts that may be useful to both experienced and new practitioners in project management specifically those involve in IT projects. These concepts may hopefully enlighten not only those who manage projects but also those members of project teams and other stakeholders such as top management or executive sponsor and project sponsors.

The Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) IT Project Management (IT Project+), originally owned by Gartner Institute, has been developed for IT Project Managers, IT project team members, and other stakeholders of IT projects that they may effectively practice their critical knowledge of business practices, interpersonal skills and project management processes, in addition to their ability to effectively plan, implement and complete projects on time and within budget. (*CompTIA*)

This cannot be exhaustive, but we’ll try to identify the skill sets, a practitioner is expected to posses, in each of the four processes of CompTIA IT Project Management:

I- Project Initiation and Scope Definition

- Identify stakeholder objective of IT project and prepare a high-level scope statement that correctly define the work required to achieve those objectives.
- Define high-level business and technical requirements, outcomes, criteria for success, stakeholders’ low-level needs and expectations including budget, duration, and risk.
- Identify the project roles of stakeholders including project sponsors, project manager, and project team members.
- Obtain stakeholders’/clients’ consensus and approval for project charter and preliminary scope documents.

II- Project Planning

- Define the deliverables/products and associated requirements
- Create a work breakdown structure (WBS)
- Identify project strategy and life-cycle
- Create schedule
- Create list of required resources
- Perform project cost estimation and create a budget
- Perform risk analysis and create list of possible project risks
- Create a communication management plan
- Create a quality management plan
- Organize a comprehensive project plan
- Validate stakeholders' expectations
- Establish change control over the project plan and develop procedures for updating/changing project plan
- Close out the planning phase

III- Project Execution, Control and Coordination

- Project monitoring, tracking, and performance reporting
- Interpret project performance indicators and identify variances from plan
- Take corrective actions
- Update plan and re-planning by project phase
- Issue tracking and issue resolution
- Risk tracking and risk removal/mitigation
- Change control
- Quality management
- Team management, coordination and communications
- Resource management

IV- Project Closure, Acceptance and Support

- Closeout meeting with customer/client/end-user and sign-off to statement of work
- Begin support and maintenance
- Change control to additional scope
- Formally turn-over deliverables to customers/clients/end-user
- Identify lessons learned and evaluate the planning, organizing, directing, controlling, execution, and budget phases of the project emphasizing both positive and negative aspects in a written report

In today's world of high market competition, one must realize the need to adapt to challenges, and be proactive, instead of reactive, in addressing those challenges by adopting acceptable practices and techniques for all activities in an organization. Information Technology, for one, which has become the life-blood of most businesses of the 21st century, must be viewed with business sense. IT projects, therefore, should be managed on the basis of tight budget, timeframe, and quality. Indeed, the application of project management methodology assures completion and implementation of IT projects on time, within budget, and within acceptable quality.

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