



Top 6 Project Breakdowns

(& How to Fix Them)



Introduction

Countless projects fail. But why? There are a number of reasons, but this eBook is going to analyze the top 6 reasons projects fail: poor pre-planning, no project sponsorship, poor budget management, inadequate resource planning, over promising and under delivering, and scope creep.

These failures can be pricey, which is why a good project managers are worth their weight in gold. Make sure your project management team is aware of the most common project pitfalls.

1 Poor Planning

Lack of Direction

You've most likely heard to the adage "a failure to plan on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part." But if you're the project manager, someone else's poor planning can become your problem. It's not uncommon for vague proposals to be pitched and sold. Unfortunately, this failure to define expectations, milestones, and desired outcomes typically leads to scope creep.

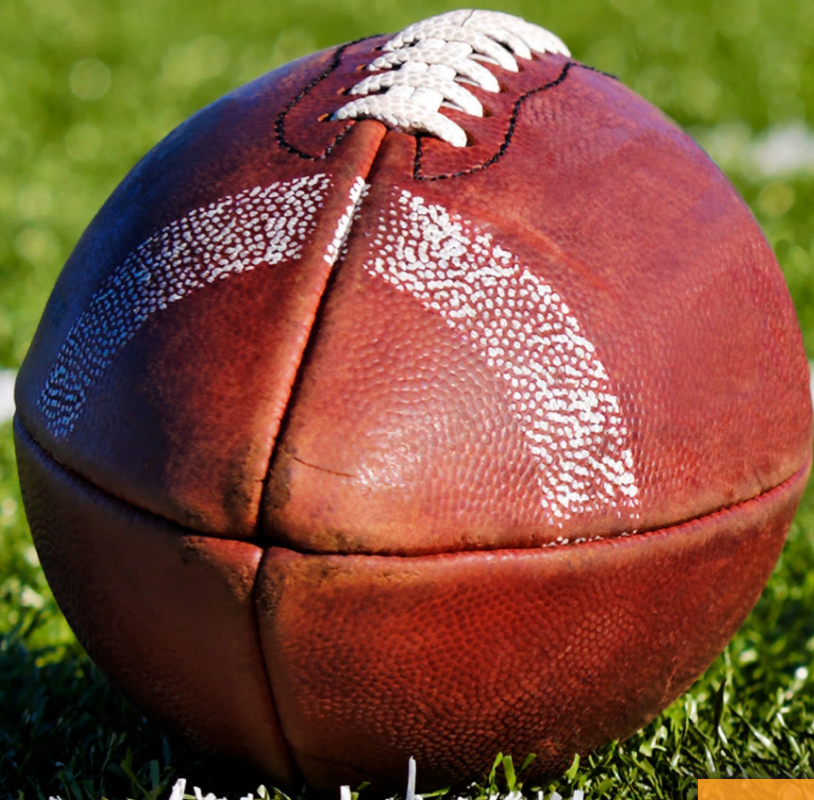
Poor statement of work (SOW) definitions inhibit your ability to effectively scope and manage projects. If you're suffering from this, take action and meet with the powers that be to better define standards around SOW development. A good SOW serves as the high-level outline for the project plan. It should include a timeline, definition of success, and milestones.

Failure to review

Creating a statement of work is great, but if no one knows about it, it loses all value. Once you've reviewed the SOW, it's time to hold a kick-off meeting. Your must team review the agreed upon statement of work and define all key players. In addition, use this kick-off meeting to set recurring checkpoints to review project progress down the road.

No work plan

While the high-level timeline and milestone outlines on the SOW are helpful, they do not take the place of a detailed work plan. List out each action necessary to complete the project, and assign action owners and deadlines. There are lots of tools out there to help with this, so instead of mapping this out of Excel, try a professional services automation tool (PSA).



You must have buy in from both teams.

2 No Project Sponsorship

Sponsorship

It is absolutely imperative that every project has sponsorship on the service provider level as well as the client level. These individuals need to completely buy into the project, and provide the vision of the project to their respective teams.

Gatekeeper

Without a gateway and approval system, you risk incubating a complete communications meltdown, with messages being dispersed, at random, to whoever is available. Avoid this by defining the project's main point of contact and approver internally, as well as at the client's company. These main points of contact should be included on all project requests and communications.

Approver

It's also vital to determine whether or not the main points of contact are also the final "approvers" of the project. Many times, they're not. So in addition to defining main points of contact, it's also necessary to determine who you're ultimately working to please, and how work will flow to them for review and approval. There's nothing worse than working to please your main point of contact, then finding out at the end that he is only the middleman and the final approver is unhappy with the outcome.

3 Mismanaged Budget

Money

Many agree time is money, but in this context, they need to be dissected separately. The SOW should have a predefined margin built in. Before you can accurately manage to a budget, you need access to the metrics the quote was built upon. Fact check it to ensure pricing is still accurate.

Technology services move at the speed of business, so it's not uncommon to encounter unforeseeable expenses. If possible, leave yourself at least a 10% cushion to cover unexpected expenses. Cover the necessities first. After primary items are procured and tested, you can then add nice to haves, such as a milestone completion happy hour for the team.

Time

This goes back to the work plan. If you've budget 20 hours for an engineer to perform an activity, but in actuality, it takes 70 hours to complete the task, you're losing money. Either you're taking a hit, or you need to make adjustments elsewhere to accommodate the unforeseen hours.

Furthermore, if you know a key employee on the project will be on vacation or maternity leave for a large chunk of the project, be proactive about making adjustments to not only hit the deadline, but also accommodate your colleague.



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4 Inadequate Resource Planning

Overbooking

Booking resources back-to-back without allowing for travel time, or simply overbooking employees leads to poor customer service and employee morale. To combat these drawbacks, allow a minimum of 15 minutes between appointments to give employees time to document their most recent meeting and travel to their next meeting. In addition, never double book, move meetings around if needed, but don't set yourself up for failure by double booking.

Assigning Unqualified Employees

What's actually required? First, look inside your company to see who possesses skills to complete the task(s). If you don't have the needed skills internally, look outside. Are there third-party services you can white label as your own? There is nothing wrong with seeking help, and it's better to use outside talent and get the job done on time.

Dont come up short when it's 4th and inches.

5 Overpromising & Under Delivering

Over

Don't promise anything unless you're 100% confident you can deliver.

Which conversation would you prefer to have with your customer: "Remember how we promised to do X? Well, unfortunately that's outside our capabilities and we won't be able to do it. Sorry." Or "Guess what? After researching X, we were able to find a solution and have rolled out the patch." Think about this ultimatum before promising anything.

Do you want to risk having to ask for forgiveness later or come back as the hero?

Under

Under delivering can come as the result of any of the project management faux pas mentioned in the previous chapters. To avoid it, communicate regularly with the customer and always set reasonable and completely achievable expectations.

6 Scope Creep

Scope creep can come from many sources. The top 3 include: poorly defined SOW, unauthorized personnel requesting changes/additions, and the authorized approver asking for more than what was agreed to in the SOW.

Stop the creep. It's the biggest reason for project failures. Chart a course and stick to it. It's to a customer's advantage to strong arm you into doing more than was promised. Don't get stuck in that trap. By clearly defining the SOW, you'll curb scope creeps. There's a huge difference between installing a server and building a datacenter. If your customer wants more, give it to them, but be clear it's at an additional cost.



Conclusion

Managing a complex project is never going to be easy, but avoiding major breakdowns surely will make it a much more pleasant experience. Just remember to plan well, assign project sponsors, manage budgets, allocate resources according to skill and availability, don't over promise and under deliver, and stave off scope creep.

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