Project Success

Project success is very subjective but is often attempted to be defined through the use of metric(s) used to measure key performance indicators that gauge the completion of activities related to agreed upon scope, quality, schedule, budget, resources, risk, and customer acceptance. Some common measures may include:
• Earned value
• Utilization rates
• Budget vs. actual
• Client satisfaction
• Benefits realization

For success to be measured and achieved it must first be defined. To define success, stakeholders should must obtain answers to questions such as:
• How will various areas of the project be measured?
• How do we know when the project is complete?
• What does success look like for each area?
• What does success look like for the project?

Establishing initial goals for the project assists with answering these questions. Success criteria can then be derived from a combination of these goals and answers to questions such as those above. This combination and a clearly defined scope lay a solid foundation for successfully defining requirements, building a schedule, executing activities, and monitoring and controlling project efforts.

However, only a fraction of all projects are ever completed within the original measurement boundaries defined during the preliminary planning phase of the project. Scope creep, change requests, technology changes, unexpected issues, and resource constraints often challenge even the most seasoned project manager. All of these challenges has the potential to devastate even the best made plans.

For projects to succeed, once baselined, scope change should be kept to a minimum. Unfortunately, there are often unavoidable circumstances that influence project scope. Blindly accepting scope changes is almost always unacceptable and will often lead to project failure. However, change is inevitable. Managers and key stakeholders must be willing to make concessions influenced by regulations, policy, practice, process, procedures, and guidelines such that the organization's goals, objectives, and work is not altered as a result of such project changes.

In instances where scope change is unavoidable communication is vital in continuing to keep the project on track and viewed as a success. An integrated change management process aids in the process of analyzing, reviewing, and communicating the impact of scope change to stakeholders. Communicating details of changes should be accomplished as early as possible and any formal change approved by the appropriate stakeholders prior to integration into the project's scope.

It is important to note, although a project may be perceived as a success does not mean the sponsoring organization is successful in its project management endeavors. Any single project can be driven to succeed by using any number of mechanisms. However, organizations achieve success in project management through the continuous application of consistent and repeatable practices and process applied across enterprise initiatives. Consistency of best practice increases efficiencies, transparency, makes it easier to identify anomalies, and is more likely to deliver successful project outcomes more often than failure.

For organizations to achieve success requires a strong and prominent organizational commitment to consistent project management that is vigorously supported by the organization's leaders and continually promoted by individuals in positions of influence. Leaders strongly influence success through their actions and leadership. Often they are sponsors or expected to interface with areas of planning, prioritizing, decision making, and conflict resolution. All of which are vital elements of successful project delivery.

Adopting a project management methodology that is consistent and repeatable across the enterprise is one way of enabling an organization's ability to control investments, make better strategic decisions, and eventually translating them into tactical results. Although an out-of-the-box industry recognized methodology can sometimes be adopted to accomplish this, no one methodology can fit the needs of all organizations. Thus, even an out-of-the-box approach almost always needs to evolve through the collection and integration of organizational process assets.

More often than not, project management methodologies must be built to accommodate an organization's unique vision, mission, strategy, culture, values, and stakeholders. Best practices, tools, and knowledge unique to the organization become the standard procedures for how an organization manages its projects. Use of a standard methodology also allows organizations to maximize each project's strategic value and helps enable success through the repeated application of centralized tools and techniques that evolve through the application of lessons learned.

As an organization matures, the consistency gained from a standard methodology becomes increasingly vital to project success. However, to ensure success, methodologies are maintained and continuously evolve to accommodate changes in an organization's strategy, direction, focus, or industry. Evolution also enables the introduction of continuous improvement methodologies. These methods effectively integrate lessons learned and process improvements into project management practices, policies, and standards to gain additional benefits, maintain their relevance, and to align them with the organization's ever changing portfolio.

The basic functions of the project manager is to apply methodology to plan, coordinate, and integrate activities and resources across functional lanes of responsibility necessary for successfully delivering project outcomes. As a result, the project manager is most influential and responsible for project success. For organizations to be successful in project management individuals performing this role must have strong communication and interpersonal skills. They should also be familiar with the organization's methodology, practices, policies, and structure in which they work. Understanding the way an organization's structure operates allows them to communicate effectively and efficiently with stakeholders and also to understand the potential outcomes of such communications.

Functional employees also play a vital role in ensuring project success. These roles are expected to accept responsibility for accomplishing assigned tasks and deliverables, complete this work as early as possible, provide status updates on the progress of such work, inform the appropriate stakeholders if problems arise, and to share relevant information with the rest of the project team.

In summary, stakeholders from across the organization are all directly or indirectly involved in influence or impacting project success across the enterprise. For more information on the PMCoP, or the CDC Unified Process please visit the CDC UP website at http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup/. ▋

Project Management Community of Practice

- **October 29, 2010**
  Leadership and Mentoring
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For more information on the Project Management Community of Practice visit the PMCoP website at http://www2.cdc.gov/cdcup/library/pmcop/ ▋

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Contact the CDC Unified Process at cdcup@cdc.gov or visit http://www.cdc.gov/cdcup to arrange a short overview presentation for your group. ▋

Contact the CDC Unified Process

The *CDC Unified Process Project Management Newsletter* is authored by Daniel Vitek, MBA, PMP and published by the Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services.

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