

# Is your project truly successful?

## “Seven ways of making your project a sustainable success”

“Excellence is doing ordinary things, extra ordinarily well”.

John W. Gardner

Research in the field of Project Management clearly shows that the importance of projects and project-based working will continue to increase for organizations around the globe. However, the level of success of projects is not satisfactory for the majority of organizations. This is clearly underlined by the results of studies such as the National Projectmanagement Study from Twijnstra Gudde and the CHAOS study from the Standish Group. Even in cases where projects are delivered on time and within budget (which is often the definition of success) the longer term effects of the projects only deliver marginal contributions to the overall results of organizations. This article presents seven

ways of making projects more successful in reaching the long-term objectives of organizations.

### Introduction

Many definitions of project success are too narrow. Delivering on time and within budget is already considered a success, while the projects' actual contribution to the overall results of the organization is considered in very few cases, if considered at all. In the profession of project management many streams are trying to provide answers for that phenomenon, but only succeed partially. The seven answers that are presented in this article provide not a cookbook solution for success but

ingredients for a different approach that organizations can tailor to their



needs in order to achieve excellence in the way their projects perform. Seven ways of creating sustainable project success are presented in random order:

## 1. Challenge the business case

Business cases are usually created by people who have a stake in the potential project. Project Portfolio management is one of the mechanism that can be used to evaluate project proposals and make sure that they are in line with the strategic objectives of the organization.

But still, in a lot of cases, the numbers should be challenged. If efficiency improvements and reductions in workload are presented, does this really lead to savings if the freed up time can not be allocated to other activities? Or, if the actual number of

available resources can not be reduced? What does the potential decreased motivation of the remaining staff do for the productivity?

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## 2. Align responsibilities of the costs and benefits of projects.

Be aware of projects being justified by business cases in which the responsibilities of the project primarily relate to the costs, but not to the benefits that are presented. Obviously this leads to a lack of ownership for realization of the assumed benefits. Therefore, senior management responsible for the area in which the benefits can be realized should be an integral part of the project organization, and preferably play the role of the project executive.

## 3. Allocate budget to the realization of benefits

Minimizing the scope and shortening the duration of projects has led to many situations in which the deliverables of the project provided insufficient (qualitative) basis for realization of the benefits. The total budget was allocated to the deliverables of the project, while additional investments are often required to realize the benefits. It is vital to create the circumstances, in which the potential benefits can be realized, up front. This requires reserving the (additional) means that are needed to let the results of the project truly benefit the organization.

*“seven ways of making projects more successful in reaching the long-term objectives of organizations”.*

## 4. Focus on Quality, not just Time and Money

Especially in ICT projects, a lot of attention has been paid to delivering projects on time and within budget. Significant improvements have been made in the last few years in those areas, driving the costs of ICT projects down and making them more controllable. The quality of the project deliverables correlates strongly with the benefits that can be realized in the organization and deserves far more attention in projects. Quality should be an integral part of the management of the projects.



## 5. Adopt changes in reality into the project

Traditional thinking about project management and line management starts to get outdated. The major disadvantage of traditional project methodologies is that projects deliver what was required at the beginning of the project, not what is required when the project is finished. As organizations operate in ever changing environments new approaches towards scope management are required to actively incorporate changes in the environment into the project. Projects that show a greater awareness of the environment in which they operate will have a much higher contribution to the organization.

## 6. Audit for maximizing success, not minimizing failure

The vast majority of auditing companies and services are derived from financial services, such as accountancy and EDP. The primary objective is to minimize the risk of failure. In order to be truly successful, project auditing should be aiming for maximizing the chances of success instead of minimizing the chances of failure. This requires a different approach and a sound understanding of the projects at hand and the preconditions for success, by the auditing party. Risk driven and performance driven auditing do not exclude each other; they can easily be applied both for most projects.



## 7. Treat ICT projects as Business projects.

Especially those projects that are driven from the IT area of an organization tend to lack the business understanding to make the project into a success that is sustainable for the organization. Most ICT projects are about developing tools with which the business can support its processes, not the other way around. Alignment with the business strategy, and clear business sponsorship and participation are crucial in making any ICT project into a success.

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## Conclusion

By focussing on the seven elements that are presented in this article, organizations can increase the positive impact of projects onto their success tremendously. It does require breaking some of the rules of ‘traditional’ project management, but the rewards are well worth it. A shift from time and costs towards quality and benefits is crucial in improving the effects of project on the bottom line results of organizations.

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