Achieving Real Project Success

A paper in the International Journal of Project Management (Vol. 26 (2008) 733 - 724) by Graeme Thomas and Walter Fernandez of the Australian National University explored the dimensions of project 'success'. Based on the findings of their in-depth survey of 36 Australian companies the researchers suggest there are at least three different criteria for success that can operate independently:

- Project Management Success
- Technical Success
- Business Success

Project management success includes the 'iron triangle' of time, cost and quality (measured by meeting the specification) plus 'stakeholder satisfaction' including sponsors, steering committees, the project team, clients and others[1].

Technical success includes elements of stakeholder satisfaction (primarily associated with satisfied customers[1]) and extends into the areas of integration, requirements met, and system use. Essentially this is a 'capability focus'; technical success means the project deliverable could work in the way it was intended and was useable.

Business success focuses on the delivery of the intended benefits, including meeting business objectives and the continued operation of the business through the implementation or change over. Business success is value focused and is only measurable some time after the project has been completed[2].

Interestingly, the study demonstrated that creating a clear definition of 'success' during the early phases of a project contributes to achieving a successful outcome[3]. The act of defining success and measuring success in a consistent way becomes a 'self fulfilling prophecy' provided it is supported by an improvement driven culture (ie, not a blame driven culture).

Understanding what is really important in achieving a successful outcome helps the project team work with its clients and sponsors in an open and effective way that maximises 'success' for the organisation. This is a value focused approach that allows informed decisions to be made based on what really matters rather than basing all decisions on the simplistic criteria of time and cost.

However, achieving the type of culture needed to allow a broad definition of success requires the involvement of Boards and top-level management in the process. Everyone needs to recognise the limitations of 'project management success' and shift the focus to 'project success' (ie, the realisation of benefits to create value for the organisation).

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[1] The importance of achieving stakeholder satisfaction is discussed in **Avoiding the Successful Failure!**, see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P046_Successful_Failure.pdf

[2] For more on **delivering value** see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1023_Benefits_and_Value.pdf

[3] For more on **defining project success criteria** see: https://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2017/07/04/defining-project-success-using-project-success-criteria/

This is a business focus and only the business can actually realise the benefits by using the project deliverables effectively[4]. Without effective 'top management support' (TMS) the overall achievement of real success is unlikely because the key decisions needed to optimise value in the business are unlikely to be made without TMS involvement.

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4   For more on **organisational change management** to generate value see:
    https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1078_Change_Management.pdf