

4 Ways to Improve Project Management to Waste Less Time and Make More Money

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The last decade has seen a shift in project management approaches. One big disruption is that agile project management (APM) methodologies have become prominent – now used by 25% of global companies, according to the Project Management Institute's 2021 "Pulse of the Profession" survey. The allure of this more dynamic approach is that it (in theory) allows projects to achieve real-time iteration and innovation without being bogged down by complex issues.

The problem with this practice is often that big picture and overarching goals of a project aren't always well-defined from the onset. Imagine attempting to solve a problem when you don't yet know what it is. This strategy wouldn't work very well. What's first required is defining the problem, then firmly establishing the requirements for solving it, and the project specs will flow from there.

Another sizable upheaval is that business hierarchies and structures are seemingly changing by the minute, thanks in part to the rising popularity of hybrid or all-remote setups. In turn, efficient project management might adopt Software as a Solution (SaaS) attributes that incorporate more outsourced and service approaches for project operations.

No matter what approach companies take, project management is invaluable to their outlook. The more aligned it is with a company's big-picture aspirations, the better it operates.

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What Disrupts Effective Project Management?

To ensure the successful implementation of the best project management strategies, companies must avoid three primary barriers:

- **Denial.** The very definition of good management in this context is re-syncing a plan to match reality. If you flip this on its head and simply wish reality would fit the plan, you continue down a path of failure.
- **Lack of investment in a project management office (PMO).** Whether it's outsourced or in house, investing in the right project management structure will have a high return on investment. Even those companies that don't have a dedicated Center of Excellence or PMO can still engage with outside specialists to deliver and manage projects on their behalf, and leadership will need to commit to realizing that return.
- **Chasing efficiency at the expense of success.** Organizations that put efficiency on a pedestal often sacrifice the quality and integrity of a project. One recurring culprit for insufficient delivery is a technique called "crashing the schedule," which expedites completion in a cost-effective way but at the expense of the product. Blowing past budgets and timelines isn't ideal, but it may be necessary to deliver a workable solution. A project that goes 50% over budget but gets 100% of the needed return will be much more effective than one delivered on budget but which gets none of the return.

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Overcoming Obstacles

Now that we've established the main impediments to effective project management, the question is how to overcome them.

1. Embrace the Culture

Project management doesn't operate in a silo; it cuts horizontally across all departments. So, there must be top-to-bottom, broad-based support – with a change management approach from leadership to all teams for project management to improve operations.

Empathetic leaders go a long way in making this kind of lasting change. At the beginning of the pandemic, for example, India-based infrastructure company GMR Group used that hugely disruptive time to transition to digital project management solutions. According to GMR Vice President of Operations, Nirbhik Sengupta, the goal was to cut waste, streamline employee processes, boost efficiency and make GMR less reliant on spreadsheets. All those benefits were discussed and cleared with employees through effective outreach.

So, it's vital to incorporate the link between business and project management into the fabric of the culture. Maintaining effective and open communication when working toward that kind of effective management is essential.

2. Have a Road Map to Your Future State

Organizational change management fares much better when a company has a solid understanding of its current capabilities and direction. To that end, organizations need to generate an Analysis/Vision/Road Map to assess the current state of the business and plan future goals based on what changes achieving

those goals will require.

3. Emphasize Leadership

Leadership in project management is the single most important aspect of creating change. A recent McKinsey study found that leadership can increase project performance by no less than 52.3%.

Effective project managers need to be trusted leaders who are allowed to be disruptive to the current system when necessary to drive top performance and worthwhile results. Leadership also needs to show an investment in giving project managers the resources and support they need to steer the ship.

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4. Create Lasting Engagement

When teams are accountable for a project all the way from development to solution, they're more engaged. Again, per McKinsey, the changes that implementation of project management creates are 25% more valuable when they're embedded into day-to-day operations. So, look for ways to remain locked into a project for the duration. Speak to key stakeholders and experts to determine other requirements and where gaps might materialize. That way, business and project management objectives can stay on the same page.

When project management is done well, it can transform a business, but determining its ideal approach is a highly individualized task. Applying these four steps will allow the implementation of a successful strategy that fits your unique needs.

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