

Early Warning Signs of IT Project Failure: Have You Experienced Them?

An Independent Study

- Researchers noticed that postmortem reviews of failed IT Projects tended to reveal that “significant symptoms” of trouble were visible early during the project.
- These symptoms can be thought of as Early Warning Signs (EWS) of IT Project Failure, which are defined as an event or indication that predicts, cautions, or alerts the project team of possible problems.
- Researchers decided to investigate the most important risks that serve as EWS of IT Project Failure.

Reference: Kappelman, L.A., McKeeman, R., and Zhang, L. (2006). “Early Warning Signs of IT Project Failure: The Dominant Dozen” *Information Systems Management*, Volume 23, Issue 4, pg. 31-36. [<accessible here >](#)

Categories of IT Project Failure

The researchers started by compiling 53 Early Warning Signs, which were grouped into three general categories:

- People-Related Risks = risks linked to groups of people, such as top management, project management, project team members, subject matter experts (SMEs), and stakeholders in general
- Process-Related Risks = centered on five project management processes and their deliverables, including requirements, change control, scheduling, communications, and resources
- Product (Technology) Risks = technical ailments of the IT system itself, including inherent product risks tied to size & scalability, complexity, functionality, and novel technology.

The Dominant Dozen

After gathering ratings from IT Project Professionals, the “Dominant Dozen” most important EWS were identified:

People-Related Risks	Process-Related Risks
Lack of top management support and commitment to the project, exposing the project to enterprise politics	Poor documentation of scope requirements and success criteria, leading to disorganization & misaligned goals
Weak project manager(s) unable to effectively lead the team and communicate with clients	Insufficient change control process to document, account for, and manage changes to requirements
Limited stakeholder involvement with requirements gathering & engagement during implementation	Ineffective schedule planning and management, often with unclear definition of milestones & deliverables
Weak commitment from the project team, often due to sponsors who impose unrealistic budgets and schedules	Communication breakdown among stakeholders with staff turnover and involvement of multiple business units
Project team members do not have required knowledge/skills to navigate technological challenges.	Project resources re-assigned to a higher priority project, yet “best-case” productivity may still be expected
Subject matter experts are over-scheduled from participating business units & their knowledge is missed	Poor business case for the project, which manifests via difficulty in justifying resources and leadership attention

Important Take-Away: Both the People AND the Process are Essential to Success

- The Dominant Dozen were ONLY related to People and Process – NOT the Technology itself.
- For organizations who have experienced a software implementation that failed to live up to expectations, the instinct might be to blame the technology.
- However, the poor performance is much more likely to be traced back to misaligned People operating in an ineffective Process (which can be a tougher pill to swallow!)

Simplar's Expertise-Based Project Delivery (XPD) Approach

To achieve success, organizations must be confident in their People (project team resources and expertise) as well as their Process (approach, schedule, and execution methodologies).

Simplar's XPD approach is a proven methodology to...

... Solve People-Related Risks

- Detailed scoping & requirements gathering templates to assist the project team capture the details.
- Hyper-emphasis on evaluating the Software Vendor's actual implementation team individuals. Ultimately, the functionality of the software is directly related to the quality of implementation team who sets it up in your organization's environment.
- Use of quantifiable past performance information on the Vendor's team and product prior to award.
- Pre-Award Clarification process ensures the Vendor's best project team individuals are assigned – and retained – for the entire implementation phases (from sales to execution).

... Add Rigor to Mitigate Process-Related Risks

- Training on scope development best practices coupled with a unique Request for Needs approach to ensure the Software Vendor Community can develop accurate proposals with minimal contingency.
- RFP language & evaluation procedures to eliminating marketing information, including anonymous evaluations, two-envelop costing, and scripted software verifications rather than traditional demos.
- Pre-Award Clarification process establishes a realistic schedule, defined milestones and deliverables, and more appropriately transfers risk to the vendor's team of experts.
- Systematic project control system to create transparency and positive accountability.

Simplar can help you!

Contact us for a Complimentary Presentation and Review

Visit [Simplar.com](https://www.simplar.com) to learn more about the [Simplar XPD Process](#)