

**PM Speak**

*Having a strong project management process in place with stakeholder management, requirements and control systems agreed from day one helps, if not avoiding, at least minimizing, the 'kitchen sink syndrome' in IT projects .*

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**□ In what way do IT projects differ from traditional projects?**

One important difference resides in the inherent intangible nature of IT projects, which brings a few challenges when it comes to setting and managing expectations of clients and sponsors. IT projects lack the physical perspective present in many projects, for example, engineering projects. The lack of a physical dimension makes it more difficult to visualize the boundaries of what is possible or practical in IT, for example, when it comes to appreciating the level of complexity required to meet a given request. This characteristic in turn may encourage stakeholders of IT projects to change their mind more frequently than they might do for other types of projects. Therefore, IT project managers need strong project management processes in place, as well as good communications and stakeholder management skills, in order to minimize the chances of ending up with requirements for overambitious designs and functions based on unrealistic budgets and time-frames.

**□ What are the dominant challenges you foresee for the software project managers in the near future?**

The challenge of keeping pace with technology, the trend for faster, cheaper and better and the globalization of projects.

The challenge of keeping pace with technology is due to the rapidly increasing level of technical complexity related to factors such as exponential growth in the

capability of computing hardware and the fast development of communication technology.

The trend for faster, cheaper and better is permeating the delivery of every product and service in all sectors of activity. This trend is impacting software project managers given that IT systems have become part of the functioning of any modern society, from the design to delivery of all goods and services. This translates into ever-increasing pressures for IT projects to deliver on time, on budget at increasingly higher quality levels.

The third challenge is the increasing globalization of projects that is demanding flawless coordination and communication on a global basis. Global and local partners need to excel in working together on projects across boundaries and time zones. As an example of this challenge, the Airbus A380 global project schedule was impacted by the fact that design software used at different Airbus factories wasn't compatible.

**□ What are the common pitfalls in managing IT projects?**

The most common pitfalls in managing IT Projects are: First high level, vague, objectives and requirements coupled with unrealistic time-frames. This situation is often followed by the project team, having no input from the user, building what they believe is needed by the client. Second a lack of client/user and senior management involvement from project start. Without client/user and senior management involvement the organization will not feel committed to the project. If the project is not supported by the client/user and senior

**About the Interviewee**

**Pedro C Ribeiro** is President of Stratech/TheProjectOffice [www.theprojectoffice.net](http://www.theprojectoffice.net) which specializes in project management and risk management consulting and training. A former Director of Ernst & Young Consulting, Unisys and EDS, he has over 25 years of executive and consulting experience with global organizations. He holds an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, having participated in the Project Management Program of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) and in the Managing Business Transformation Program of the Harvard Business School. He is a certified Project Management Professional PMP, a Director for Central & South America PMI Risk Management SIG, the past Regional Chair South America of IT & Telecom SIG and a Board Director of PMI Educational Foundation. Pedro Ribeiro lives in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

management who will waste time in supporting a given project? Third the absence of effective change control system designed and agreed with key stakeholders from day one. A change control system should include not only project requirements but change control of resources assigned and committed to the project. Change is a fact of modern life and will continue to increase at a faster rate than ever before. It is not realistic to expect no change in a project. However, uncontrolled changes mean uncontrolled time-frames, scope and lack of adequate resources committed to the project.

**□ How to avoid 'kitchen sink syndrome' in IT projects?**

Scope creep is a process of trial and error for clients to discover what they really want in the absence of a strong and structured project management process. The project team drifts away from its original purpose trying to continuously please the client with new functionalities without a corresponding increase in schedule, or resources. The impact is often late and overbudget projects with unhappy clients, sponsors and a project manager with a damaged career at the end. Having a strong project management process in place with stakeholder management, requirements and control systems agreed from day one helps, if not avoiding, at least minimizing, the kitchen sink syndrome in IT projects.

**□ What is the role of communication in success of IT projects?**

Effective communication is the key for the success of any IT project. Experience indicates that many times scope, quality and schedule problems are in fact disguised communications management problems. Good project communications management includes determining the needs, information and the time of requirement, as well as distributing information and reporting performance according to an agreed plan with key stakeholders. Good communication management provides the essential links among people and information. This is the key for project success. Communications, if not properly managed, will increase the level of misunderstandings and conflicts, with negative impacts on project performance. The amount of effort applied on communications in a project should be proportional to the level of project communications complexity, which increases with the number of project stakeholders, their dispersion in time, project phases and geographical location.

**□ What is the scenario on the 'risk management' front?**

Businesses and governments all over the world are facing a dynamic and complex environment. *The Global Risks 2007* study published by the World Economic Forum reported an increase in almost all its risk categories, as well as a

growing disconnect between the growth of global risks and the ability of business and governments to mitigate them. Organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to implement processes and standards that can enable them to deal more effectively with risk and therefore, maximize opportunities and minimize losses in the course of achieving corporate objectives. The development of Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) frameworks and the new ISO 31000 on Risk Management currently under development, are examples of responses to this scenario. We will be seeing project risk management, defined as the systematic process of planning for identifying, analyzing, responding to and monitoring project risks, becoming more and more standardized and aligned with evolving corporate risk management frameworks.

**□ What are the major dos and don'ts in IT projects?**

**Dos**

- Have a strong project management process in place, including a definition, agreed with key stakeholders, on how the project will be controlled.
- Identify and involve client/user and senior management from project start. Remember that there is no project without them.
- Establish clear deliverables, metrics, approvals and sign-off processes with your client/user and sponsors.
- Plan your work and <sup>a</sup>work and control your plan.
- Establish a lessons learned process to continuously improve your projects during the project life cycle.
- Communicate, communicate and communicate.

**Don'ts**

- Never start a project without understanding who your client, your user and your sponsor are and what they really want.
- Don't skip any of the dos above.

**□ Many reports, such as the one from Standish Group, suggest high project failure rates. What are your suggestions for the improvement of the success rates of IT projects?**

Studies like the Standish Group's Chaos Report are important not specifically because of the precision of statistics, but because they lead to reflections on the experience and feedback of IT project professionals. Using the Chaos Report as example, the Standish Group has studied over 40,000 projects in 10 years. This is significant. Its findings on key factors for IT project success like User Involvement, Executive Management Support, Clear Statement of Requirements, Proper Planning, Realistic Expectations and Smaller Project Milestones, provide input for IT project managers to think about how to improve IT projects.

**□ Is there anything else that you would like to share with our readers?**

The field of project management is evolving rapidly. We are amidst a major change in the competitive landscape. Many organizations and some governments begin to perceive project management as the next competitive advantage, as total quality became in the 1970s. Organizations that will survive the next years will need to competitively time-to-market their ideas, products and services fast on shrinking time-frames, lean budgets and according to increasingly high quality standards. This will require excellence in project management ♦

Reference # 17M-2008-03-03-10