



iPlanWare TeamWorks

Spotting a failing project

A series of white papers containing our collective experience of project portfolio and resource management. Over the years we have worked with many organisations and found out what works and what doesn't work. No rocket science here, just basic principles that any organisation can follow.

Spotting early warning signs that a project is failing can make all the difference between getting the project back on track and having to kill the project off.

Here we examine some of the common signs and indicators we have identified over the years.

These are not big indicators like lack of business case or no stakeholder buy in.

Rather the subtle messages that should make you watch things a little closer.

Spotting these problems doesn't mean the project is going to fail - but if you see three or four of these then think about getting the project on your radar.

Spotting them early won't guarantee you can get things back on track - but the earlier you start fixing the better the chance of success.

No velocity

Failing projects often have poor velocity. Velocity is a simple but effective measure of progress. A simple metric is to look at what the project has achieved, how long it took and how long it was expected to take. As a project advances, velocity should increase as the team gets used to working with each other and understands the project better. If velocity is poor you have a problem.

Poor quality outputs and deliverables

When projects hit problems people start cutting corners. Constantly monitor the quality of outputs and deliverables from projects for early warning signs of problems.

Speak to the people at the coalface

Managers are normally the last people to know about a failing project - so speak to the project team. You can get some big signals from a short "how is it going" conversation around the water cooler.

Controls, plans and logs

Take a quick look at the controls and records the project is keeping. Is the plan up to date, is there a log of issues? Basic things, but if a project is going off course one of the first things to be neglected.

Shifting goalposts

A key source of project failure is lack of direction - right down the food chain. Keep a close watch on projects where the end game keeps changing.

The overtime fix

A quick fix on a failing project is to throw people or hours at the problem. This can indicate the work is taking longer than planned or there was no realistic estimate of how much work was involved. Both bad signs. Some people would argue that any overtime is a bad sign.

Constantly changing priorities

Do the priorities on the project change from day to day. If so this indicates no clear plan or set of priorities. Not a recipe for success.

Things stick at 90% done

Its amazing how often people get the first 90% of the work done to schedule, but the last 10% refuses to budge to 100%. If you encounter this syndrome then the project team is finding it hard to estimate and report progress. Start tracking on a 0% complete or 100% complete scale.

Agile project or chaotic project

We are supporters of agile project methods given the right project and the right team. But often an "agile project" is a cover story for a disorganised project. Agile is more than working down a list of tasks - it is a discipline that needs to be followed.

No estimates

Whether agile or waterfall, all projects need estimates. No estimates = big problem.

Customer interest

Watch the customer. We use customer in a loose sense here, as the person who is paying the bills or needs the outputs from the project. Are they still motivated, are they giving answers in a timely manner or is their attention somewhere else.

Reasons projects fail

Above are the early warning signs that may indicate problems with a project. However, these are not reasons projects fail.

If you want to make sure your project has a high probability of success, make sure you have these points covered:

- Get senior manager support
- Have clear vision of the needs / requirements
- Ensure you have the right skills in the team
- Communicate effectively
- Be prepared to say no
- Manage expectations
- Assume nothing
- Give bad news early
- Be proactive and not reactive

About iPlanWare TeamWorks

By seamlessly integrating tools for project control, scheduling, project accounting, resource management, time and expense tracking and issue and risk management, iPlanWare TeamWorks accelerates project delivery and optimises resource usage.

Available as an installed or Software-as-a-Service solution, iPlanWare TeamWorks lets you prioritise your projects, optimise your resource usage, monitor overruns and identify problems early. It simplifies project reporting and lets your project managers leverage best practice to accelerate project delivery.

Choose your delivery option

Available as a Software-as-a-Service or an installed solution, iPlanWare TeamWorks can be implemented in days to maximise your investment.

iPlanWare services advantage

With nearly 10 years experience of delivering business solutions worldwide, iPlanWare can provide the optimum mix of consulting and training to help you realise the full benefit of TeamWorks.

Key features and benefits

Browser based delivery: Delivered by a browser, the solution offers unprecedented levels of functionality. iPlanWare TeamWorks lowers total cost of ownership.

Project collaboration: iPlanWare TeamWorks delivers a platform that lets your people work together on projects.

Real-time information: iPlanWare TeamWorks provides real-time project visibility into your projects resources, processes and status to improve communication and productivity around the team.

Standardise your project process: Standardise your methods and process using project templates. Reporting and tracking across the portfolio becomes a breeze as all projects have the same structure.

Automate processes: Integrated timesheets, logs, expense reporting and status reports means jobs that took people hours to complete can be done in a fraction of the time. Free your people to work on the things that matter.

Simplified and standardised reporting: To enable effective decision making, executives need the same information from all resources, teams and managers. Using iPlanWare TeamWorks means people get the information they need - when they need it.

About iPlanWare

Our growing customer list consists of organisations of all sizes across Europe, North America, Middle East and Australasia.

They come from a broad range of project based organisations, including consulting, professional services, advertising and PR. They also include internal IT departments, programme management offices and technology companies.

Contact information

For iPlanWare sales or to find a local reseller visit:
www.iplanware.com