

9 Pitfalls to Avoid When Conducting a Collaborative Project

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Teamwork and collaboration are keys to success in almost any industry or business. Yet collaborative projects often fail, costing organizations time and money. Find out more about common reasons projects fail or experience challenges and how technology from Visual Planning can make a difference in this white paper.

What Makes a Successful Project?

▶ The Project Management Institute conducted a survey to find out what makes organizations more likely to achieve success with collaborative projects of all types. To understand those factors, PMI divided survey respondents into categories and paid especially close attention to two groups:

- Champions, which were organizations that completed 80% or more of projects successfully
- Underperformers, which were organizations that completed 60% or fewer projects successfully

▶ Project success in the PMI study was defined as on time and on budget while also meeting original business goals and realizing high levels of benefits. It turns out that there's a vast difference between champion organizations and underperformers when it comes to various project factors. Consider these differences, for example:

Project Factor	Percent of compliant projects in champion organizations	Percent of compliant projects in underperforming organizations
Project Completed On-time	88%	24%
Project Completed On budget	90%	25%
Project meets/ Supports Business Goal	92%	33%
Project has Scope Creep	28%	68%

Source: Pulse of the Profession PMI

Supporting Successful Projects by Avoiding Common Pitfalls



▶ If you're investing in collaborative projects, you obviously want to do what the champion organizations are doing — they're the ones experiencing more consistent success, after all. Whether you're running collaborative field teams working to complete installations in client homes, managing technical implementation or development projects, or working to continuously improve your internal

processes, one of the first steps toward becoming a champion organization is identifying some common pitfalls in collaborative projects.

Read on to discover nine of the most common problems in collaborative project efforts, what causes each and how you might avoid them.

▶ 1. Scope Creep

In one survey, project managers note that **92% of projects** that fail do so, at least in part, due to scope creep.

Scope creep occurs when a project begins to creep outside of the box it originally fit in. For example, a construction contractor might take on a project to add a garage to a residential home. The project is quoted and planned based on adding a two-car garage.

- ▶ The customer decides later they want a three-car garage. They also want the construction company to finish the garage a certain way, painting the floors and adding shelving. Perhaps they also want a small room on top of this garage. This is an obvious example of scope creep.

Unfortunately, in business situations, scope creep isn't always as easy to identify. And that's especially true with collaborative projects. One person might think, "I'll just add this one small thing. It's inexpensive and will only take a few hours." But if everyone on the team is adding little bits here and there, the project can grow unexpectedly, putting budgets, timelines and even client satisfaction at risk.

▶ **Causes of Scope Creep**

- Lack of well-defined goals for the project. Goals should be concrete, measurable and have a timeline attached.
- Poor communication about who is responsible for certain aspects of the work. Ensure everyone involved knows the project scope and their scope within that.
- No oversight from a project leader and business sponsor or champion. Projects perform best when they have an experienced leader and someone responsible for holding the project team to business goals.



▶ **Missing the Deadline**



In 2019, businesses that lagged at using technology to manage **projects missed project deadlines 41% of the time compared to 61% for those that successfully used technology.**

Missing deadlines are bad for collaborative projects for a number of reasons. First, not completing the project on time means you're not delivering to the end-user — whether that's an external client, an internal employee or a business partner — as agreed. That's bad for business reputation and customer satisfaction.

But missed deadlines also mean you have to keep working on the project, tying up your resources and putting future work efforts at risk. It may also mean team members are stuck working on projects that are dragging on, which can reduce employee morale.



▶ Causes of Missed Project Deadlines

- Setting a goal and timeline that is simply too robust for the resources at hand. Goals should be challenging but possible.
- Poor resource planning and scheduling. Before you commit to timelines for any project, you need to know the resources will be available to support success.
- Not setting milestones. Milestones break your project up into smaller deadlines and let you check in on processes and make adjustments as necessary to meet future deadlines.

▶ 3. Going Over Budget

Around **85% of projects come in overbudget**, at least to some degree.

Budgets do change as teams get into the work of a project, and there's usually some expectation that numbers will fluctuate within a specified range. But coming in way over budget is bad for business. That money comes from somewhere, and the options are typically: from the client or from funds earmarked for other business needs.

Hitting the customer with large overages at the end of a project decreases their satisfaction with the work. Covering the overage yourself puts profitability in danger and may reduce your ability to handle other projects or business tasks.

▶ **Causes of Going Over Budget**

- Failure to define a budget to begin with. Any collaborative projects should have dollars attached so teams know what they have to work with.
- Underestimating or quoting. Use good data, technology and knowledge to ensure your estimates and quotes are as accurate as possible at the beginning of the project.
- Scope creep that expands a project. If you're going to commit to doing more during a project, know that it's going to cost more. Set milestone dates when you can check and tweak the budget if it's absolutely necessary.



▶ **4. One or Some Team Members Carrying the Workload**

"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." – Michael Jordan

Some players on a basketball team are going to score more goals. Talent, position and sheer luck all play a role in those figures. But that doesn't mean anyone on that court can slack and have their team consistently win championships. Everyone has a job to do on a basketball court.

The same is true with project teams. Some people may be more visible to others, but success comes when everyone is doing their part. Otherwise, the employees who are pulling the weight will eventually burn out. Not to mention the fact that everyone brings different skills to the table, and if one or two people are doing all the work, you're not getting the benefit of all those skills.

▶ **Causes of Project Work Load Imbalance**

- People don't understand what their project role or responsibility is. Start every project by defining each person's roles as you define the project.
- People don't realize it's time for their part. Have a well-defined hand-off procedure so team members can tap each other in at the appropriate time.
- You have the wrong people on the team, so some people don't actually have the skills, knowledge or desire to do the work.

▶ **5. Having the Wrong People on the Team**

In a Wharton Business School experiment, **four-person teams took 44% longer to build a defined LEGO figure than two-person teams.**

Having the wrong people on a collaborative project — or the wrong number of people — can make it difficult to manage. The wrong people can mean that you don't have employees with the right skill sets on the team, but it might also mean you didn't pick people with the motivation to do a good job. And the Wharton Business School experiment demonstrates that more is sometimes less when it comes to projects.



► **Causes of Having the Wrong People on a Project**

- Teams were put together haphazardly. Avoid grabbing the nearest or most convenient employees for a project team. Take some time to consider the purpose of the project so you can choose people with the skills and personalities that align best.
- Too many or too few people are on the team. Every project is different, and there's no magic number for how many people an effort will take. Consider the specifics of the project and what else employees may need to attend to when deciding how many people the collaborative effort may take.
- Only in-house resources are used. Your project might require skills and knowledge your employees don't have. Don't forget to consider vendors, business partners or consultants and their potential role on your project teams.



6. Communication Issues

More than **70% of employees say they don't really understand their company's strategy** and worry about missing out on important updates.



Communication is the life blood of a project — literally. Think of a project as a human body. The brain is the project plan, and all the organs are the people doing the work. If blood (aka communication) isn't flowing in both directions, things aren't going to work well.

And yet, if the vast majority of employees don't understand the goals of your business, why would they understand the goals of individual projects? It's important to communicate the big picture and ensure members on the project team have open lines of communication with each other.

Causes of Communication Issues

- People don't think about sharing information. You may think it's obvious why a project needs to happen or why one resource had to be replaced with another. But other people involved may not know why, so take time to communicate information.
- Teams rely on ineffective communication methods. Email is a great tool, but it's not always the best communication option for project teams. Consider investing in other tools that let teams chat in real time and ensure no one is left out of the loop.

- Overcommunication drowns out the important data. At the same time, do set some boundaries for what information must be communicated and when and how. For example, if you use project management software to communicate, consider setting channels for specific information and others for team chats so updates don't get buried.

7. Redundant Work

Rework can account for as much as **23% of the costs of some construction projects.**

Lean Manufacturing defines various types of waste that should be cut out of processes and projects to ensure utmost success, efficiency and profitability. One of those types of wastes (or muda, as they're called in Lean), is rework.

Rework can refer to redundant efforts that occur due to:

- Work not being done correctly the first time and having to be redone
- Work being done simultaneously by multiple people
- Work being done repeatedly because of miscommunications or poor project planning



▶ **8. Work Not Getting Done**

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” - Andrew Carnegie

Sometimes, project work simply doesn't get done, putting success at risk. This often occurs when the team and project is managed as a whole but the various parts are not managed well. As Carnegie says, teamwork involves individuals who need to meet their goals so the overall effort can succeed.

▶ **Causes of Work Not Getting Done**

- Specific people weren't asked to do something. If you tell the project team as a whole to take on a task, everyone may assume someone else is handling it. Ensure you're assigning tasks individually.
- People are overwhelmed. Follow good resource management practices when developing project teams and goals. Someone who already has 38 hours of work on their plate can't handle 12 hours of project work this week.
- People don't have the resources or tools. Check in with your teams regularly to ensure they have what they need to get the job done.

9. Team Members "Checking Out" Before Success

"It's fine to celebrate success, but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure." - Bill Gates

If a collaborative effort takes a couple of hours or days, people will probably stick through to the end. But if it takes weeks or months, project team members might check out long before the finish line, leaving others to run the race alone.

This can reduce the resources of your team, lead to workload imbalance, reduce employee morale and negatively impact the quality of project outcomes.

Causes of Team Members Checking Out Before It's Over

- People are tired, bored or frustrated. If they're not seeing some level of success, they may not care to try anymore. Ensure you're setting milestones so they can celebrate success along the way.
- Team members are being pulled for other efforts. People are valuable resources, and someone else might need those critical skill sets. Ensure everyone in your business is working together to prioritize and align projects to keep team members from being pulled in opposite directions..
- People might think the project is over. Consistent communication and strong project definitions keeps everyone involved in the project until it's actually completed. Consider letting people know there will be a final meeting at the end of the project to talk about what worked, what didn't and what can be done better next time.

▶ How Can Visual Planning Help You Avoid Common Pitfalls of Collaborative Projects ?

PMI's Pulse of the Industry for 2019 dedicated a substantial amount of time to looking at the difference between organizations with high project management technology quotients (PMTQ) and those with low PMTQ.

PMI defines PMTQ as a person or organization's ability to integrate and use technology for project management. Those with high PMTQ had significantly more success with prioritizing the right projects and skills, meeting project business goals, completing projects on time and within budget and managing scope creep.

Visual Planning can help your organization develop a higher PMTQ. Our products support you in avoiding all nine of the above project management pitfalls by:

- Ensuring excellent communication among your team members
- Supporting data-backed business decisions and workflows
- Helping you manage resources, including people, inventory and equipment
- Reducing the effort it takes to schedule and plan
- Integrating with other systems for better insights, management and communication without extra work
- Supporting remote and field teams with software solutions that work on the cloud
- Providing many more benefits for managing projects, people, communication and other business needs

If you're ready to become a project management champion organization, leveraging technology to boost success for all collaborative efforts, reach out today. You can book a demo or talk to one of our reps about what types of solutions we have that might be right for your business.

Discover Visual Planning

Contact us if you would like to know more about Visual Planning.
We can organize a free and completely personalized demonstration for your teams.

