

# **IT Project Management: Ten Rules for Enhancing the Human Element**

by Kevin McGaffey and Rob Beckmann

Every organization is looking for keys to enhancing the Information Technology (IT) workplace to; integrate the IT organization into the business through alignment and strategic planning, make the IT organization a key driver of change in the organization, make the IT organization and its partners aware of the need to deliver business solutions on time and on budget, build an IT organization that promotes achievement and accomplishments, and delivers hard benefits back to the business.

IT Project Management is one of the most complex tasks for people and organizations to manage. It requires project managers to be expert jugglers in a dynamic environment where none of the project parameters stays static for any length of time. Educational institutions and certification organizations are fast at work trying to ensure that project managers have the skills and tools available to manage the process of project management but little is done to teach and mentor project managers on the key aspect of each and every project: People. People have to do tasks to make the project successful. Given the maze of challenges IT organizations face in these times of increased complexity and pressures from the business one often overlooked area is the people who work in these organizations day-in and day-out delivering on projects. Enhancing the human element in your project is the fundamental key to success. Ensuring that you have a developed strategy around people management in your project will put you on a solid foundation for a successful outcome.

In this article, we have taken a step back on our combined 58 years of experience in IT delivering hundreds of projects to assess and determine the lessons learned working in large complex IT organizations as employees, service providers, consultants and trusted advisors to leading North American companies. We believe that there are patterns to successful performance by individuals and teams in projects and would like to present ten rules to enhancing the human element.

1. Remove obstacles to team performance; bureaucracy, politics, and unnecessary meetings. Your focus as PM is to protect the team and ensure they focus on the important work that delivers the results expected. You should lead the team and do not get immersed in the details. Remember you are the CEO of the team.
2. Reward individual and team performance regularly not just at the end. Make it a point to recognize individuals and the team at unexpected times throughout the project. Celebrate your team's success. It keeps people motivated and focused on the end goal.
3. Just like a coach in hockey, recognize the flow of the game and play the right line combinations – look ahead and put the right people together in situations where they are given the best chance at completing successfully. Provide the team with the road-map, leave them free to make mistakes, observe their course and provide positive feedback for course corrections. This will ensure that it will make them think through

the requirements and it will assist in building their confidence as an individual and team.

4. Build the right environment for people to work in - physical and cultural. You need to build an environment that will allow people to allow them to ignore all the noise and focus on the tasks at hand, overcome adversity and thrive under pressure.
5. Be proactive in addressing issues both internal and external to the project team. Recognize issues early and attack them so that they are resolved to stakeholder satisfaction.
6. Knowledge is more important than documentation. There should be no documentation for documentation sake. You need to encourage knowledge sharing between individuals and across teams. Remember your team will have to work with other teams to ensure success and sharing knowledge is critical to this.
7. Over communicate to everyone – make sure people are aware of what is coming at them from your project roadmap. Make sure that people are not “surprised” at any stage. If you have vendors involved with your internal team, communicate to them daily during critical project periods to ensure that everyone is in sync around the goals and objectives.
8. Key business stakeholder is part of the team. The people representing the stakeholder concerns should be made to feel that they are active participants on the project versus just an involved bystander. That is, they should be contributing to real deliverables and are part of the day-to-day execution of the project as much as possible. Active participation from one or two key representatives of the business is always seen as a harbinger of project success. By becoming ingrained as part of the project team it becomes much easier for the stakeholders to communicate their vision of the system to the other team members and to take ownership of the project outcomes.
9. Team is part of the planning process. As a project manager you need to make your team an integral part of the planning process to gain their buy-in to the estimation process and individual task estimates. Respect their estimates and they will feel that their input is valued. You will not have difficulties in holding people accountable.
10. Be consistently positive in your attitude towards the project, your team, key stakeholders and executive management

It would be difficult to adapt to all ten rules in your organization and we are not proposing that you do so. Implementing a few of the above in your projects will, we believe, enhance the holistic environment that people work in. The people working in the context of these projects would begin to feel better about their contributions leading to an increase team performance and accountability. Ultimately, this will ensure that your project crosses the finish line successfully with a fulfilled group of people.

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