

A longer description of the project

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Project Management Critical Success Processes (CSPs)

After myriad studies into the main causes of project failure, most project managers can list the main factors that distinguish between project failure and project success. These factors are usually called Critical Success Factors (CSFs). However, together with some strengths, CSFs are also too general and do not include specific enough know-how, to better support project managers' decision making. This research has analysed the impact of specific processes on project success and identifies critical success processes (CSPs) that project success is most vulnerable to. As a result of this research, project managers, programme managers and senior managers can better invest their limited time and resources in the most effective project management processes. The research has identified project management and top management support CSPs for different project scenarios, for example, industries, cultures and level of risk.

The research's theoretical foundation has been derived from various disciplines, including organisational theory, planning, control, cultural diversity and maturity models. Specifically, the model that has been developed in this study consists of the two following components: Project manager's know-how (includes processes for which a project manager is responsible) and organisational support (includes processes which should be offered by the organisation in order to properly support project processes). Based on this theoretical foundation, a model and a questionnaire have been developed aimed at identifying a list of planning and top management support processes that project managers and executives can use to improve project success. These have been validated in a pilot study and across industries. Based on the validation of the model, data has been collected in organisations around the world.

CSPs have been identified by analysing the relationship between a set of project management processes and project success dimensions. This approach allows managers to focus on the most effective project management processes in each unique project environment. Results also provide organisations a valid tool to evaluate the quality of their project management efforts, as well as to compare themselves to other organisations. Using this model, each organisation can identify unique CSPs that may be more emphasised in the unique organisational culture.

Results from this research indicate that various project processes have a different impact on project success. The six critical project management processes with the highest impact on project success include “definition of activities to be performed in the project”, “schedule development”, “organizational planning”, "staff acquisition", "communications planning", and “developing a project plan”. By far, the identification of project's activities is the most significantly critical process. In order to effectively execute this process, a project manager has to own a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) and a project management plan. Then, decomposition is required, subdividing the project work packages into smaller, more manageable components. The activity definition process defines the final outputs as schedule activities rather than as deliverables, as is done in the WBS. It has been found that implementing these steps increases project success.

Analysing project managers’ efforts, it has been found that project managers usually do not divide their time effectively among the different processes, when applying a “cost benefit analysis”. For example, too much time is spent on “resource planning”, while too little time is spent on conceptual processes, such as “quality planning” and “communications planning”. Based on this paper’s findings, project managers may consider a different distribution of effort among project management processes and executives may do the same regarding top management support processes.

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