

necessary decisions or if the line is uncooperative and does not seek constructive solutions for the generally unavoidable conflicts of interests. A steering committee can do little to make up for weak line management or weak user representatives. It is also an ineffective way of bringing uncooperative line managers into line. A good steering committee takes strategic decisions together with the project manager, without intervening in day-to-day operations.

# flyer

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on the logic of succeeding

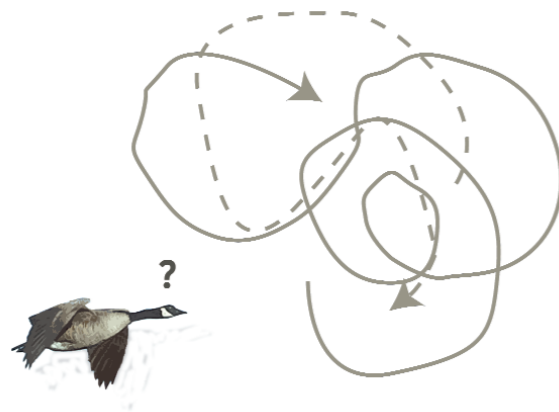
## patterns of success and failure in projects

why projects often go the wrong way

Despite the undeniable progress made in project management software, the failure rate for projects has not come down over the past few years. A closer look shows that most projects do not fail because they set out to accomplish impossible tasks. They fail because various interests clash or because of omissions on the part of the management.

It seems that it's always the same patterns that lead to success or to failure. Of course the right pattern of behavior cannot guarantee success; whereas there is a strong chance that some patterns will produce a crash.

Successfully combining leadership, experience, foresight, pragmatism, and skill is the cornerstone of project management designed to deliver success. In short: using the right tool with the right method. Success or failure is generally determined by behavior patterns that are selected subconsciously. **This flyer sets out a brief description of seven behavior patterns that promote success and seven patterns that foster failure.** Some of these may be familiar to you.




where can project management patterns help?

Recognizing behavior patterns can be useful for assessing the quality of a project. Success cannot be guaranteed. But being aware of the pattern involved can help ensure corrective measures are effectively implemented with the right critical distance. After all, project management's core task is to constantly realign the action taken with the targets at hand.

how can itopia help you?

We have long-standing experience in managing complex projects. We have learned to use patterns that promote success, and eliminate those that foster failure. We'd like to help you do the same.



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## factors that lead to success, or the logic of succeeding

**1. Success is more likely if the project owner is good at talking and even better at listening.** There are many different facets to the role of the project owner. He or she can clearly explain what the project should achieve. Sometimes, he is active within the project. And sometimes he clears the way for the project. He operates at the interface between the project and the project's surrounding environment – which means he is a key factor in whether the project succeeds. If he knows what he's doing, he will be well aware of this. He negotiates scope and objectives right at the outset. This makes it easier to get a handle on any complex conflicts of interests. And it makes it possible to always keep those involved up to date on how the project is doing and, if necessary, to respond with appropriate strategies



**2. Success is more likely if a bird in the hand is seen as better than two in the bush.** Project targets consist – explicitly or implicitly – of scope, quality, time and costs. Targets must be achievable: this may be a cliché, but it is surprising how often it is overlooked. A project with unachievable targets is doomed to fail. Unfortunately, failure is also inevitable if project targets have to be revised downward at a later stage. Unattainable targets feature among the most important reasons for loss of motivation.

**3. Success is more likely if you know what is important. And what's not.** Spell it out – quite customary when it comes to setting out project targets. Everything has equal importance; there are no priorities when it comes to scope, quality, time and costs. If there is no specific brief, everyone in the project will decide for himself or herself what should be done or not done. And this can produce an unfortunate ending or – even worse – a never-ending story. In contrast, clearly defining all the priorities at the outset makes a major contribution to the success of the project. All those involved have a clear structure on which to base their day-to-day decisions.

**4. Success is more likely if everyone is clear on what they should or should not be doing.** An unclear definition of roles – apparently very popular, but undeniably bad for success. Here, a good project owner is what is needed. One who can keep the individual interests of the various project members and line units under control. One who sets out

who can take what decisions. And one who says who communicates what. In short: one who invests sufficient time and energy in defining roles. So that everyone knows what to do and what to keep out of. The incentive for the project owner? The team will show its appreciation by making the project successful.



**5. Success is more likely if project management knows when to cut a little slack.** No complex project ever runs entirely to plan, right down to the last detail. This is why the project manager continually runs a “project reality check”, identifying and assessing risks, and implementing corrective measures, without attaching any blame – either to himself or to others – for mistakes made. Each project is a unique undertaking. There must be room for error – and for rectifications. Consequently, a successful project manager will plan in enough time for remedial measures. Only those who insist on seeing the wood despite the trees can act calmly, making sure they keep a critical distance and retain a sufficient overview.

**6. Success is more likely if common sense prevails.** Common sense tells us things sometimes don't happen as we expect them to. It helps us keep our eye on the ball. It also puts our faith in methodology and tools into perspective, and keeps unrealistic expectations in terms of deadlines, costs and what we can deliver in check. Common sense gives us the scope to let staff members also have a say, and to make mistakes on occasion. This goes for project managers and project owners, as well. It tells us we sometimes have to adapt our plans, and that corrections and conflicts of interests are necessary and normal. Admittedly, this does not make the project any easier for the project manager, but it does lead to an altogether healthier situation.

**7. Success is more likely if a project team is a team.** Almost everything is easier if people are on the same wavelength. Intensive communication is needed to reach this level of intuition and consensus. There can be no room for misunderstandings or hearsay. If all the members of the team have the same understanding of the targets, expectations and procedures involved, then one of the most important prerequisites for success has been put in place.



## factors that lead to crashes, or the logic of failing



**1. Failure is more likely if you take on more than you can handle.**

Even in the best companies, the temptation is there to suddenly cram a lot more into an ongoing project than is wise. The scope of a project is broadened, sometimes insidiously, sometimes overnight. This increases workloads and leads to acrimonious discussions. It also wastes a lot of energy and goodwill.



**2. Failure is more likely if too many people have too little to say.** Project management, line duties and daily business are poor bedfellows. Thankfully, the days when people had to wear too many different hats are a thing of the past. Splitting up duties and – much more problematical – splitting up responsibilities dramatically increase the project manager's workload in terms of leadership and communication.



Since most project members are committed to the project, everyone wants to contribute and have their say. Energy is squandered in relatively unproductive but time-consuming discussions. Not to mention the fact that successfully juggling a number of different duties is beyond most people.

**3. Failure is more likely if the project plan is the be-all and end-all.** No plan should be set in stone. Plans cannot completely set out the future down to the very last detail. This would lead to situations where results were still being delivered long past the point where they were necessary. And where no-one could see the point of the individual tasks any more. Deviations from the plan are punished, even if this leads to facts and changes from the project environment being ignored or suppressed. If something is not allowed, it is simply not an option. No arguing over the fundamental principles: the project plan has to be complied with.

**4. Failure is more likely if the project manager likes to control rather than manage.** If a project manager prefers to report on problems rather than solve them, then the writing is on the wall. Likewise if he sees his main task as being to implement the project plan as precisely as possible. This requires a stringent level of control. All tasks have to be carried out exactly as scheduled. A raft of statistics shows how the plan is being implemented; the project is buried under control measures. Which leaves no time for ongoing, critical reflection or for preparing management decisions.

**5. Failure is more likely if you think too much or think too little.** “It'll never work” – the war cry of the moaners and the groaners. A project ruled by skeptics and doubters is in serious danger of failing. Such projects waste a lot of time and energy on things that have already gone wrong. An excessive amount of time is invested in avoiding problems, to such a point that the avoidance strategies themselves start to jeopardize the project. Focusing on what has already gone wrong gets in the way of identifying solutions. Mistrust and resentment are mistaken for critical distance. The constructive counterweight here is risk management: risks and the impact of these risks have to be assessed. Systematic risk management is a useful way of keeping skeptics in check.

**6. Failure is more likely if you think only other people make mistakes.** Wanting to do everything yourself can sometimes prove costly. If you believe that not only can you do everything yourself, but that you can do it better and cheaper as well, you could be missing a crucial point: sometimes, bringing in a solution from outside can prove a cheaper and more innovative way of achieving what you want to achieve.

**7. Failure is more likely if steering committees put too much emphasis on the “steering”.** Things can start to go wrong if, as a result of the decisions it takes, the steering committee intervenes, either deliberately or unintentionally, in daily business. The temptation for the steering committee to step in arises if weak line management fails to take the