



A few pitfalls to **avoid** to prevent a project going off the rails

The challenge

The diversity of issues dealt with and the variety of participants involved can rapidly send a project off the rails. Conflicting needs, multiple constraints, new actors involved during the process and differing understanding of the priorities can affect costs, deadlines and the extent of the scope covered. Fixing simple rules throughout the life of the project – and keeping to them! – can help you avoid the classic pitfalls of project management.

8 key points of caution to keep in mind

The following checklist will help you reconcile the need to keep the project under control with the need for flexibility.

1 Size the project realistically

Under sizing the project through an excessive desire to control costs and deadlines incurs the risk of having to pay a high price for lack of resources during the project.

- **Start with the expected outcomes** (= "the project will be successful if...") and not with your perception of the resources available at the time.
- **Size the project in terms of complete costs** without underestimating indirect costs.

2 Clearly specify the scope of the project

As participants delve further into the details of the project, demands tend to accumulate which risk expanding the scope of the project continuously.

- **Clarify the needs** the project has to meet, but also those which are outside its scope.
- **Specify the leeway** in relation to this scope.
- **Document** the reference scope simply and precisely.

3 Clarify and regularly update everyone's objectives

Effective collaboration cannot take place if the responsibilities of each participant are not clearly allocated and shared.

- **Formalize the objectives** of each participant and explain them to the team.
- **Update** these goals throughout the project while anchoring them in tangible milestones (deadlines, deliverables, interim results).

4 Get everyone involved from the start

Getting people involved little by little risks revealing demands or constraints too late that could call into question choices already made.

- **Try to involve** sponsors and other departments potentially concerned **early on** in the project in order to anticipate conflicts of interest.
- **Invite suppliers and service providers** to kick-off meetings to anticipate implementation constraints.

5 Design a solution that allows for change

All projects evolve. It is better to have this in mind from the start than to lock in a solution, however good it may be in view of the initial specifications.

- **Prefer modular solutions** that may later be enriched or extended.
- **Choose technologies** that will enable subsequent changes to be made at a reasonable cost.
- **Accept to "lose time"** early on in the project not to be trapped later on.

6 Closely monitor critical tasks transversally

There is always slippage. What is important is to detect it sufficiently early on so that it does not accumulate and have a snowball effect on the project as a whole.

- **Identify critical tasks** where delays will affect other tasks within the same or another team.
- **Use visualization tools** (PERT charts, diagram of costs, etc.) to keep an overall view.
- **Encourage everyone** to communicate even the smallest slippage.

7 Ensure that everyone remains committed

If everyone remains committed, the project will progress. Keeping participants involved, even during phases where they are not directly solicited, will ensure they can be mobilized rapidly.

- **Plan regular information updates** to keep everyone (project team, sponsors, suppliers, service providers, etc.) informed of the progress of the project and its subsequent stages.
- **Ask for regular update meetings with the board** or with a few key executives to keep their support for the project.

8 Know when to close off the project

Improvement adjustments can easily penalize costs and deadlines towards the end of the project. Don't give in to the temptation to perfect things during the last stages of the project.

- **Fix the validation circuit** according to the key objectives of the project.
- **Analyze each request for enhancements** in terms of additional mobilization of resources or budget extensions.
- **Launch another project** for additional requests.