

Better progress measurement is the secret to successful projects - and a crucial objective for IT in project-driven organisations ¹

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There are three kinds of lies when it comes to project management: lies, damned lies, and initial project timelines.

That could be the [conclusions of research](#) led by Bent Flyvbjerg, a professor at Oxford University. After compiling the results of over 16,000 projects ranging from construction to IT, he asserts that only 8.5% achieve their initial objectives within the allocated time and budget.

A recent study by Hexagon, in collaboration with the Project Management Institute, offers a more nuanced view. It reveals that a significant share of companies (40%) report that fewer than half of their major projects meet planned timelines and budgets. Conversely, 20% say that these objectives are achieved in 80% or more of the cases.

Due to the vast complexity of large projects, it's often impossible to know exactly where one stands at any given moment. Decisions are therefore made based on partial, missing, or simply false data. Without reliable information, it's impossible to compare projects, make corrections, or identify failure areas - this leads to guesswork and often incorrect assumptions.

A problem of frameworks

Improving progress measurement begins with choosing the right project management frameworks.

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IT managers play a key role here in avoiding subjective or opaque method choices. Poor methods often share common flaws: manual input and manipulation of information, lack of objective definition of milestones, and inability to prioritise what's important. This leads to 'box-ticking' without genuinely advancing the project.

During the design phase, what can be advantageous is the use of the weighted milestone method: establishing a list of milestones that make the design stages measurable, then weighting the properties to complete for each milestone. This allows for measuring progress incrementally between milestones and avoiding the "black boxes" that obscure the project's progress.

Understanding what gets in the way of high project performance

However, the inability to ascertain a project's status is not merely a methodological issue. In reality, three categories of factors play a role:

- **Technical factors**, such as manual data management, key information storage in Excel files, or the inability to delve into details and verify information. These are naturally among the primary areas of focus for IT departments. One solution could be adopting a suitable Enterprise Project Performance (EPP) platform. This platform would integrate key project functions (project management, controls, resources, etc.) and connect to multiple data sources like ERP and business applications.
- **Organisational factors**, like silos between stakeholders and the absence of standardised reporting or agreed milestones. The IT department can help mediate these issues - For example, by promoting the adoption of a Definition of Done and its criteria, as seen in agile projects.
- **Human factors** range from optimism bias to the fact that certain project participants have incentives to keep information to themselves or they can sometimes exaggerate progress. These factors are inevitable in large projects which involve numerous teams and subcontractors all working with one another. One way to limit their effect is to automate objectivity.

Automating Objectivity

To overcome these challenges and reduce human biases, a key goal is to eliminate as much as possible manual and subjective progress measurement in favour of automated and objective measures from multiple sources. The numbers don't lie when it comes to progress management, and objectivity unlocks the path to success by doubling down on data.

Going Beyond Self-reporting

Take the case of a construction project: even in mega-projects, it's not uncommon for the progress of certain tasks to be measured solely on the subcontractor's progress assessment, with all the risks this entails.

How to get better results? By integrating project schedules with other indicators, such as physical measurements of progress via mobile applications (or drones), management of materials and quantities reported by RFID tags or barcode scanning, and accounting data from ERP - ideally in a single interface.

Integrating Project Controls

The ability to automate these various data streams and use them to make project decisions is one of the most effective strategies for project success. According to a recent study by Logikal, only 5% of projects achieve this level of automation - but their success rate then soars to 79%!

This effect applies to projects across all sectors and is due to two factors: greater confidence in the data and the enhanced ability of project controls to fulfil their role. The less data needs to be collected and manipulated manually, the more transparent, immediate, and usable it is. On the scale of a large project, this means the possibility of correcting course before problems arise.

The key to successful projects?

For projects to be a success, the status quo needs to change whereby project decisions are made with missing or complete data. Reliable information is at the core of better decision-making and the obstacles to high performance need to be navigated, whether they are technical, human or organisational factors. Progress management after all drives

the success of project management and it is important not to look at project management without affording it real consideration.

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