

Chapter XIX

Early, Often, and Repeat: Assessment and Evaluation Methods for Ensuring Stakeholder Satisfaction with Information Technology Projects

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ABSTRACT

IT projects across all sectors are relying on more iterative methodologies that can employ early and frequent assessment and evaluation processes in order to ensure that project deliverables are satisfactory. This chapter provides a practical overview of assessment and evaluation processes and how they can be built into any of the various project management and development models. Methods discussed include: audience and needs assessment; approaches for maintaining engagement with stakeholder audiences; requirements and feedback-gathering methods including focus groups, surveys, and other communications; and evaluation and review methods such as usability testing and user acceptance testing. Iterative cycles of assessment, prototyping, evaluation, and implementation will be demonstrated through examples and process model flow diagrams.

FAILURE AND SUCCESS: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ask any project manager: How many ways can a project fail? They will list many paths to failure, from doomed objectives to overdrawn budgets to

implementation that is delivered just as core technologies become obsolete. Ask how many ways can a project succeed? Many project managers will say “by delivering the desired functionality on time and within budget.” But the visionary project manager, the tuned-in project manager, the flexible and proactive project manager? They will tell you that success must be achieved in the eye

of the stakeholder. Just as the tree falling alone in the forest makes no sound, without stakeholders to perceive success, there is no success. Three propositions regarding stakeholder satisfaction with IT projects synthesize the practices of project management, stakeholder analysis, and evaluation and form the foundation of this chapter.

Proposition One: *The perception of success is subjective and requires stakeholders.*

The practice of managing projects has produced a number of different popular formulaic approaches, which may differ in emphasis but typically share some common elements related to planning, managing, controlling, communicating about, and learning from projects. Often the emphasis in managing information technology (IT) projects is placed on controlling the schedule, coordination and supply of staff resources, and implementation costs (Schwalbe, 2000). In many environments, the service or system to be delivered impacts multiple audiences that exist in organizational or customer spaces that are isolated from each other as well as from those involved in the project deployment. The definition of “stakeholder” is in itself often overly limited to members of executive management or other higher-ups. As a result, key stakeholders are not identified ahead of time, critical inputs are missed, and misplaced assumptions regarding priorities result in great unhappiness amongst all of the potential stakeholders, in spite of a project that has been delivered on time, within budget, and matching the requirements that have been provided to the project team (Drummond & Hodgson, 2003). While timely and frequent communication with stakeholders is often noted as a key to project success, early identification of and engagement with all stakeholder audiences is even more fundamental (Pinto & Kharbanda, 1996). Stakeholders can be defined in multiple ways and may vary based on the context and project. A primary first step for any project is

to identify the stakeholders and determine how best to engage and manage their participation (Umbach, 2006).

Stakeholder analysis is a practice within the fields of business and management that seeks to identify and manage stakeholders within an organization. (Mayer, 2008). Research and theory regarding stakeholders and how to define and manage them has proliferated since the early 1990’s. Motivations for broadening the definition of “stakeholder” within an organization can include both social responsibility and profit. The stakes that are held may be weighted with according difference (Mitchell, Angle, & Wood, 1997). In either case, the goal of attending to stakeholder interests for the purpose of achieving success has been well documented (Van Grembergen, 2002).

Project management has become a commonplace tool for success in multiple fields, from construction, architecture, and engineering, to business, technology, health, and increasingly, higher education environments. The practice of inclusion and attendance to stakeholders in these fields varies, but IT project management does recognize some aspects of both the role of the stakeholder, primarily in the form of communications, and the role of evaluation, primarily in the form of testing (Schwalbe, 2000). However, a more comprehensive assessment and evaluation methodology is needed within IT projects in order to account for an unusual multiplicity of audiences. For example, a typical information system’s stakeholders may include the system administrator that supports the machine on which the application resides, the application administrator who supports the administrative users of the application, the administrative user who provides customer support and service for the application, the customer who receives services from the application, and the management team who reviews performance and makes decisions based on metrics and customer feedback regarding the application. All too often, one or more of these key audiences is overlooked, with the result

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