

How You Can Save Time & Guarantee Failed IT Investments

In these days of lean, mean organisations, you cannot afford to agonise over wasting money on IT projects. You have to be fast and bold. Here are some guaranteed shortcuts to IT disasters. Use the points to score your biggest project and adopt enough ideas to eliminate the uncertainty.

Efficient Staff Management

Distrust your staff. Don't let them talk to system implementers – your senior managers know all your operational detail. [15]

Maintain utmost secrecy. Staff find the unknown stimulating. [20 points]

Stay unspoilt by the modern emphasis on flexibility & customer responsiveness. Subordinate IT to Finance. That way, the bean counters will install computers to sack some people. It worked in the 1960's. [15]

Ensure the project only gets part-time resources. It's easy for line staff to balance today's customer crisis with implementation next year. [20]

The new system will save headcount. Anticipate this. Take this resource out of the business well before the project is finished. [20]

Avoid project steering groups with representative membership. Better to root the new cross-company system firmly in one department, so all departments know where they stand and will agree to it. [10]

Never, ever train staff in new IT facilities. They will only leave. [25]

Avoid IT members on due diligence teams when acquiring companies. They can stitch systems together when the big picture people have done the deal. [25]

Castrating Uppity IT Vendors

Never tell people what you want. Make this a test of vendors. If they understood your business like they claim, they wouldn't need telling. [20]

Never tell IT suppliers your future plans. They're outsiders, techies and gossips. If their solution doesn't match your aspirations, confront them with accusations of incompetence, lack of understanding and (most effective of all) deceit. [15]

Say your IT needs are "less than rocket science". IT people admire clever, original sayings and will respect your price/performance goal. Apollo 11 took 80,000 tons of material and fuel – the equivalent of a cruise ship – to carry two passengers and scrapped the lot during one return trip. [10]

Keep things DIY, craft-like and avoid overpriced professionals. Major IT systems are among the most complex devices humanity has ever created. Your younger accountants can knock them up in their spare time. Just like you make your own vehicles, furniture and telephones. [15]

Since continuity, support and qualifications are irrelevant, get someone's teenage kid to build something critical to your business during the summer holidays. [15]

Since all IT software, hardware and staff are identical, buy solely on ticket price like you do for other commodities. [15]

High-Impact Project Management

Fire up projects informally. A senior manager should get things started by collaring IT staff outside the toilets. [25]

Set some arbitrary deadlines. Stick to them while inserting more work, to show you mean business. [20]

Keep project boundaries ill-defined and allow scope creep. An expanding assignment encourages creativity. [25]

Insert more work without moving end dates. If you lock both, then the quality will also stay fixed. [20]

Install simplistic, rigid systems. Everyone finds their IT needs are smaller and less flexible than expected. [20]

Set an example. Only work on IT projects in spare time like weekends and evenings. They mustn't disrupt real work. [15]

Take out one project resource for each of these: the new system directly affects outsiders such as customers; reliability & availability are critical; the technology to build the system is unfamiliar or unproven. [5 points for each reduction]

Ensure the business rules to be built into the system are new, or poorly understood, or those involved are new to the company. [5 points for each]

Computerise a new venture *immediately*. [20]

Promise, but never deliver, a fixed project office with ornaments like project plans on the wall. It encourages team bonding so you'll never get rid of them. Project staff should squeeze on desk corners and use gaps in meeting rooms where the disturbances stop them sleeping. [15]

Avoid redundancy of feedback & control mechanisms. To save work, rely solely on a single communications channel. [15]

If they feebly want presentation dry runs, insist no attendees are outside the project team, so all news is refreshingly raw when presented to the senior management team. [10]

Reject *any* e-commerce project. It is either a fad or IT staff wanting toys. Look at Boo.com. [20]

Organisational Culture – Rigidity Is Key

Intensify the fear and blame culture. Ensure secondes to the project have no way back to the business. It encourages the calculated risks & knowledgeable people the project needs. [20]

During senior review meetings, attack people not ideas. It's quicker. And a lot more fun to see those overpaid toads crash to earth. [15]

Pre-select the hardest working IT team member as the sacrificial lamb. It saves time later. Better still, by showing what happens to the blameless, it makes the dodgers afraid of you. [15]

It is the technology, not the people using it, that delivers the benefits. So just slam it in and sit back for the flow of benefits. [20]

When date or cost forecasts have provisos attached, always hark back to the numbers, minus the qualification, later. [15]

Suppress debate and especially contrary views. They slow you down. You certainly don't want to be the last lemming over the cliff. [15]

If you want to get back at your enemies, withdraw your co-operation from IT projects. You cannot be blamed, since it takes ages for the damage to the organisation to show. [25]

Rate How You Handle IT Projects

- Less than 75 points. Serious risk of success. Adopt many more of these techniques.
- 76-150 points. Pathetic. Show them what you are made of.
- 151-225 Poor. Adopt more of this best practise.
- 226-300 Better. Your projects will probably fail quickly.
- >300 points. Congratulations. You have achieved the management goal of certainty. Find a bigger company to wreck.

E-mail martin.tate@itevaluation.co.uk if you are serious about antidotes to these issues during system reviews, IT strategy & IT system selection projects.