HOW TO AVOID
THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

HALL OF SHAME

5 FAILED PROJECTS OF THE PAST

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The Hall of Shame is a dreadful place for a project to find itself. These five projects started as great ideas but fell short due to mistakes, overlooked details, and communication breakdowns.

With almost 70 percent of projects failing, there's much to learn from the Project Management Hall of Shame.[1]

Project failure #1

DENVER'S BAGGAGE BREAKDOWN

Proposed as the "most advanced baggage handling system in the world," the Denver Airport baggage claim project was supposed to automate the luggage sorting process. It delayed airport renovation by 16 months,[2] adding $560 million to the cost.[3] In the end, only one of three sections worked, and monthly maintenance cost $1 million. It was scrapped 15 years after the original deadline.[4]

WHY IT'S IN THE HALL OF SHAME

Improper planning: Planners did not fully vet the project, therefore severely underestimating the cost and time to complete the project.

Lack of communication: Details weren't effectively communicated to the stakeholders of the renovation project.

> Successful projects require realistic expectations and contingency plans. Proper planning and communication are vital.

Project failure #2

TROUBLE IN WATERWORLD

The filming of this sci-fi movie was fraught with complications, and writer Joss Whedon was flown to the set to revise the script. The original director left with only two weeks of filming to go.[5] Kevin Costner, the film's star and eventual director, was responsible for many of the decisions that caused the budget to balloon to $235 million.[6] Filming went long, partly due to unanticipated difficulties of filming in a harbor.[7] *Waterworld* didn't make a profit until it went to VHS.[8]

WHY IT'S IN THE HALL OF SHAME

Improper approval processes: Lack of process meant filming started without a finished script, and constant changes nearly sank the profit.

Poor visibility: With each decision, the project moved further and further away from the original release date and planned budget. The director and stakeholders had no visibility into how each of these decisions would affect the film's overall success.

> Successful project leaders plan each project step and gain visibility into how each misstep can affect the goal.

Project failure #3

DOOMED PONTIAC AZTEK

The Pontiac Aztek drifted down a sad road when the production team failed to inform the designers of a key project constraint: the vehicle needed to be built on an existing minivan platform.[9] The once tough, futuristic, cool design thus was doomed to make the lists of "worst cars of all time," "ugliest cars of all time," and "worst inventions of all time."[10] General Motors forecasted sales of 75,000 units. GM needed to sell 30,000 to break even, but sold only 27,322 cars.[11] Buyers didn't like the look, the price, or add-ons like a two-piece tailgate with cup-holders.[12]

WHY IT'S IN THE HALL OF SHAME

Designed by committee: The original design concept was manipulated by the production department in order to meet strict budget plans.[13]

Misunderstood the audience: The creators wanted to build a vehicle that met the demands of Generation X. They failed, however, to sell it at a price their target market could afford.[14]

> Successful projects establish up front who needs to know what and who is responsible for communicating that information. The minivan platform requirement ultimately changed the entire look and destiny of the Pontiac Aztek.

Project failure #4

ENDLESS VISTA

Released nearly five years after Windows XP, Vista was designed to fix security issues, convert users to the platform, and generate revenue in spite of years of delays. It had too many versions for the public to digest and more than 50 million lines of code (15 million more than XP, causing it to run even slower than before).[15] Despite a $500 million marketing campaign,[16] consumers rejected the upgrade, and one-third of new PC owners downgraded from Vista.[17]

WHY IT'S IN THE HALL OF SHAME

Mismanaged expectations: Despite promises of a faster platform, Vista was clogged with too much code. Plus, existing software on the market wasn't compatible with Vista, creating a barrier it couldn't overcome.[18]

Missed objectives: One of Vista's top objectives was to fix major security issues found in XP, but consumers abandoned the bloated, intrusive fix and were left less secure than before.[19] Essentially, the final product didn't align with the strategic objectives.

Successful projects follow a lot of rules. Delays created anticipation to which few products could measure up. Project leaders failed to manage expectations, get complete visibility into issues, and follow a strict timeline for the product's release.

Project failure #5

OVERSPENDING IN SOCHI

The Sochi Olympics in 2014 gets a gold medal for project management flop. Preparation lasted years, but when guests arrived in Russia, facilities were still under construction—hotels lacked water, window coverings, and in one case, an entire lobby floor.[20] One of the Olympic rings even failed to light up at the opening ceremony.[21]

WHY IT'S IN THE HALL OF SHAME

Low visibility: Without a way to see expenditures, the Olympics ran $40 billion over budget.[22]

Mismanaged work: Without a way to manage both planned and ad hoc work, tasks fell through the cracks.

Planning resources for unanticipated problems keeps projects on track, on budget, and on time—a hard lesson for the Sochi Olympics folks.

The Hall of Fame

The walls of the Project Management Hall of Shame are lined with mistakes and poor planning. Avoid joining the ranks and meet the tool that will lift your project to the Hall of Fame.

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