

Will the project succeed? (and how to avoid being involved in a failure)

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When I first started in the world of projects and management consulting, I had some amazing mentors, and some of their advice comes to the front of my mind when I consider each new project. There are all types of statistics for different types of projects and industries, but I think these fundamentals underpin any project.

The primary advice was “You never want to be involved in a failed project – you’re only as good as your last project.”

“Obvious” I hear you say. True, but it is still good advice to keep at the front of mind before you commit to a project in any way. The important answers are to the question “How can you predict if a project will succeed or fail before you commit?” This is where the true wisdom and experience lies. So here are some elements I look out for – I’m sure there are others to consider also.

1. Sponsorship from the top that is vocal and visible – top executives must truly need the change to happen
2. The nominated executive sponsor has the time and knowledge to provide leadership and direction to the project team
3. Project team members have the right skills and experience
4. Some of the best operators are taken out of operational roles to join the project team
5. Internal team members assigned to the project are respected by their peers and staff generally
6. A genuine case or reason for change that can justify the cost and disruption for stakeholders exists
7. A diverse project team exists, in which all members are committed to working together for the same goal, and who have compatible values and work ethics – there is no “I” in team
8. Adequate resources are assigned to deliver the project cost effectively in the allocated time

Do these elements exist for the project you are considering initiating or becoming involved in? Can they be generated early in the project establishment? If not, walk away. If they did exist, and at some point they disappear during the project and there appears to be no way to reclaim them, also walk away. It is better to close a project or leave a project than to persist to failure.