



The Role of Vision as a Critical Success Element in Project Management

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Have you observed projects that on the surface seemed to satisfy all project success criteria, yet the project was not deemed a success upon conclusion? This led me to research project management success criteria as part of my recent doctoral thesis. After reviewing over 65 peer journals, I concluded that there are 7 critical elements for successful project outcomes.

One of these critical success factors is project vision. Simply stated, a vision sets a direction; it is instrumental in signaling change to stakeholders. Furthermore, maintaining project vision had significant impact on successful completion of projects, especially on its timeliness for completion due to factors such as enhanced decision making and managing scope creep.

Action gives vision life. Some suggestions for your vision and to keep it in the forefront of your projects include:

- **Ensure Shared Vision.** A vision tells us what the final results will look like and assists us in knowing when a project is finished. Without the team working in harmony towards the vision, we have seen churn, anxiety, and worse, unnecessary delays and rework/redirection when teams were not in alignment. If you suspect vision isn't shared, address it in the manner appropriate for your project and team.
- **Make it clear, inspirational, relatable:** A vision statement should be crafted with "clarity, continuity and consistency."¹ It should inspire a cause or an achievement, leading one to take ownership of the dream itself^{2,3}. Once the team and stakeholders feel a sense of ownership and can relate to project outcomes, they are likely to be at their highest motivational level for project success.
- **Make it visible:** The project champion, sponsor and project manager all have a role in communicating and maintaining the project vision throughout the lifecycle of the project. Look for opportunities to communicate the vision. For example, when celebrating milestone completion, conspicuously state progress towards vision, such as, "We're one step closer to our vision of ..." Or, when faced with key decisions (especially if you use checkpoints or gates), reference the vision – make your decision with the thought of, "does this get us closer to reaching vision of...?"
- **Continuous Vision Improvement:** The world seems to be changing at an incredibly fast rate. Periodically evaluate and refine your vision as needed, considering new critical issues that impact your sector, business, or even operations.

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While there has been a considerable amount written on the topic of vision in the general leadership and business literature, little has been written about the topic in the project management environment. But, from our experience in the field, without shared project vision, a project is at risk of failure from the outset.

The above is an extrapolation of concepts from Dale Christenson's "The Role of Vision as a Critical Success Element in Project Management", a thesis submitted in partial completion of requirements for a Doctor of Project Management at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (2007).

About Roeder Consulting

Roeder Consulting is a people skills training and strategy implementation firm dedicated to helping you manage change successfully. With an 89% project success rate, Roeder Consulting combines decades of experience with the latest research to harness the power of your people and your organization.

Sources

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