



Global experts in Employee  
Management Solutions

**Top Ten Tips**  
**Successful IT Project Implementation**

## Introduction

The statistics are quite shocking. Only one in three IT projects actually meet the goals that they were planned to achieve. In fact, a startling one in three actually fails completely. Added to the inevitable wasted cash investment in infrastructure and people's time, the knock-on effect of one failed project is that the next one, no matter how well intentioned or executed, will have to be delivered more quickly and engage users more readily if it is to succeed. It will always be fighting the last project's own bad PR and story.

### **But why do most projects fail to deliver their expectations?**

In most cases it is because the business case and the process they were initially designed to address weren't fully understood, reviewed and rationalised before the specification was drawn up.

Simply automating a bad practice isn't going to help the situation. It simply adds another layer of mistrust and another unnecessary step in a valueless process. Even when all the innovation possibilities, wastage and simplification is attended to in the design and training stages, there is still no guarantee that the project implementation will deliver the benefits that initially swayed the decision to invest in it.

The history of IT project management is littered with intranets that are launched in a fanfare but then quickly start to gather dust, customer relationship management systems that are just a glorified card index system, and order process applications that still print out reams of unnecessary paper. Technology can deliver but ultimately human interaction and the system's usability are extremely important. Even if there is technology to help with a process, being a 'number' isn't going to win hearts and minds; even if it looks pretty.

### **So why can't the owners of the project improve the ratio of success?**

Well of course they can but it may mean taking a bit of a different route through the process. To start with, there is one common question every manager will ask themselves in frustration at some point or other in the career. That question is; 'surely the staff must realise that it is for their own good, because if it is for the good of the company; if it make us more efficient and therefore profitable and competitive; it will ultimately improve their own job security. Why won't people just knuckle down and get on with it? It's obvious isn't it?'

And therein lies at least one of the major problems. We often ask the wrong questions and this is one of them.

A better question would be 'what we can do better to ensure people can see the problem it solves, for them'.

There is a certain irony that the success of the very thing that, in theory at least, is meant to speed up communication and the flow of knowledge around an organisation is limited by the lack of effective communication.

Technology may aid the speed of communication but not its effectiveness – real people do that by communicating what the benefits are to them personally.

You, as a manager, are trying to affect a change not on one single group, your workforce, but on a group of individuals. The use of authority is not leadership and certainly will not win their fulsome and willing cooperation.

Leadership is about learning communication skills above and beyond what you think you need, so that when you do need to promote change you challenge assumptions and look at alternative ways of doing things. You can state your view with clarity, leaving them in no doubt that you really believe in it. Then, as you turn away, your people will, hopefully, follow.

‘No one ever changed the way they behaved or felt about an issue because they read somebody else’s mission statement or read an email.... if they indeed read it at all’.

Any bad news story spreads like a cold breeze and travels around the world before good news has got his boots on.

Before we go on then, it may be useful to know why you, and I, and our colleagues struggle with change.

It’s an old saying, ‘Everybody wants change, but nobody wants to actually change themselves.’ It’s a fundamental human trait that we all find it uncomfortable to move out of the comfort of patterns of behaviour we understand and feel risk-free within. It arises directly from our very basic drive to keep us and our progeny safe. To avoid those who might eat us, or hurt us or take our mate away. It is an animal instinct that has been the key to the survival of our species. It is our first duty and urge; passing on our genes to our next generation. It is a drive we share with every living thing, but we differ massively in one key area in that we, as humans, have what we believe to be unique in the living kingdoms; the ability to imagine the future.

In one way this is a blessing and that is why we are so very different. This skill allows us to be creative, solve problems and innovate. It also drives enterprise and entrepreneurship. On the downside it also makes us masters at imagining the worst and creating our own misery.

Any change in pattern we don’t recognise, the brain initially will see as a threat and then rationalise later. That process can take milliseconds – the person putting their head towards you is actually your mum giving you a kiss not a mugger, or months – like a new IT system, to several years – the loss of a job. It depends on the assessment of the threat.

The brain’s default position is do something, anything...then figure out if it’s a threat or not. It sets off an immediate rush of chemicals to prepare us to run, fight, or whatever we may need to do to survive. Even a small change in something can result in feelings of discomfort. This is a direct result of the release of the very chemicals that make us able to run, jump, fight, heighten our awareness and speed of reaction, and they are the reason for that uneasy feeling of anxiety. We are ready to jump, but we don’t know where to exactly.

The triggers can, at first glance, appear to be remarkably trivial. Changing how you clock on for work, many feel, is the equivalent of changing their bank account. Feelings of panic, threat,

conspiracy and the fear of failure are all manifestations of insecurity and anxiety as an imagined change in the normal, comfortable patterns they would normally feel comfortable within.

The good news is that change is manageable — to a degree anyway. It's not easy. It has no measurable end game. Change is constant and will run at a different pace with different individuals, from flat out, guns blazin' to dead stop. It just takes longer than people think. Just as some of us bungee jump, some of us like to sit at the back of the bus near the emergency exit. We all have different sensitivities to the threat of change and risk. If the bus traveler is one of the key influencers in the group, then full adoption will travel at their speed.

If you want a simple example of just how quickly and massively change can happen, you have to look no further than your email inbox to see the proof. Just 20 years ago we still communicated using brown envelopes with boxes for handwritten names to circulate for memos. Now they have been replaced by email overload and over communication. Interestingly, in some key groups, email is already becoming obsolete. For example, it's rarely used by those under 20 where instant messaging and Facebook have taken its ground for that generation. Is it any better or more effective than actually calling or, better still, having good face to face meetings? Sometimes it will do but for the big stuff, definitely not. In fact, for many projects, if used without due care, email can even act as one of the best and most highly effective change prevention tools.

**So what can we do effectively engage with the users and potential abusers of our new 'system'?**

What do we have to do to gain their support, reduce their emotional reticence and allow them to learn openly without preconceptions?

Employee Engagement is currently under a very bright national spotlight. Billions of dollars are lost each year due to low levels of engagement. This includes some immeasurable factors like enthusiasm, innovation, creativity, learning new skills, collaboration, diligence and lost productivity.

Unauthorised absence is also a key indicator, with results of the 2012 Absence Management Survey conducted by Direct Health Solutions revealing that average days lost to absence in Australia are 8.75 days per annum, per employee.

On average, the cost of absence per employee per annum is reported to be \$2,861, representing a huge labour cost to business.

## What stops or helps us build that level of engagement?

The following are 10 points you might like to consider, before, during and after the implementation of a new process, initiative, IT program or readjustment of a company's culture, or indeed for any day-to-day supervisory task or workforce management issue.

1. People are more open to change when they feel appreciated.

What are you doing as an individual or organisation – every single day – that makes people think, “They really get me”?

2. People are more likely to engage when their skills are identified and their development is supported.

How much will it cost if you choose not to develop your people? Loose one engineer and it will cost at least three times their salary to replace their skills in recruitment and training — often significantly more.

3. People will engage more when they know their opinions do matter.

Do you encourage staff to stand up and speak up, or ask for their feedback – and then value their views and opinions? Or are you unapproachable and unresponsive? What if their idea could save you 50% of your production costs?

4. People willingly engage when their job makes use of their talents.

Do you allow people to use their own personal skills? Are you willing to allow your staff to risk failure and then give them permission to fail and try again?

5. People engage when their sense of individualism is recognised and they are allowed to flourish.

Are you inviting people to promote their uniqueness, or defend it, or hide it away?

6. Everyone is different. Every group is different.

It's a fact we often forget. Another person's value system arises from a million different experiences they have had throughout their life - and it will be different to yours. They simply

will not see the world as you do. Why should they? It's not better or worse than your view, just different.

Acknowledge that difference and persuasion becomes easier, but only a little. Remember you are changing a group of individuals not a single entity. People accept and engage when their unique definition of engagement is respected.

Have you asked your people what engagement feels like to them?

7. People will engage more when their commitments outside of work are respected.

Have you accepted the fact that work isn't the only determining factor in how your people live their lives? What affects them in the 18 hours a day when they aren't clocked in will affect them at work. The opposite also applies of course.

Flexibility, compassion and acknowledgment of the individual will go a great deal further than a pay rise in winning loyalty and commitment.

8. People collaborate when they're treated as assets to be valued, not a cost to be managed.

What do you see when you see your colleagues and what do they see of you?

9. People stretch themselves when the organisation makes it possible for them to become more valuable.

How are you making it hard for people to grow? Or easy for them flourish?

10. People get involved when the work they do makes a significant contribution to something they value.

Do you provide opportunities to do meaningful work that helps others?

## Conclusion

With any new project or organisational change, communication must be carefully planned from the onset, measured and monitored throughout the implementation process, and above all flexible and responsive enough to react to the different messages that may be coming back.

Change is not easy but it will be twice as hard if the reason why it is needed is not communicated with clarity, conviction and belief that it is the right thing to do.

Communication must be consistent at every stage, from initial discussion, pilot, rollout to delivery training and accepting feedback constructively, fairly and firmly. But no matter how good your strategy is, without the engagement and willing collaboration of the workforce any operational change will at best be sluggish and at worst just fall flat.

Technology can help the process but can't address the human aversion to change.

For more tips on change management and workforce management systems visit us online at [www.mitrefinch.com.au](http://www.mitrefinch.com.au)

## About Mitrefinch

Mitrefinch provide a range of intelligent Workforce Management solutions.

It all begin with an idea back in the early 1980s, when our developers set about leveraging advancements in IT to automate the manual process of "clocking in" to record employee time and attendance.

But we didn't stop there. We've spent the last few decades developing a host of Workforce Management solutions and pushing the boundaries of what is possible with an automated time and attendance system. Along the way we have earned a string of awards, and more importantly built a large base of satisfied customers.

Currently, employees in up to 4,000 organisations around the world "clock on" using a Mitrefinch system, from concrete fabricators in Toronto to Zoo Keepers in Hertfordshire, and from the First Minister of the Scottish Government to students in Sydney!

This means that we are speaking to hundreds of organisations every week who are looking to improve the way they manage their work time data. We listen to concerns, take on board suggestions, make recommendations and answer questions.

Sometimes these organisations are taking their first steps to replacing a manual system, while others are looking to replace an existing IT system that simply doesn't meet their needs.

Our whitepapers are based on our experience with these organisations - we hope you find our experience useful.



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