



Successful Projects Are Designed to Adapt

No Project Goes Exactly to Plan

Have you ever worked on a project that unfolded exactly as planned?

Schedules slip, requirements change, team members interpret priorities differently, and external vendors miss deadlines. Every project encounters unexpected developments, large and small. I have worked on numerous projects over the years, and I have yet to see one proceed entirely according to its original plan.

This uncertainty is inherent in project management and execution. Projects bring together people with different perspectives and capabilities to work toward outcomes that must take shape through execution. As the work progresses, assumptions are tested, new information emerges, and circumstances change. No matter how carefully a project is planned, not every development can be anticipated.

When Execution Changes the Plan

Project outcomes are shaped not by whether unexpected developments occur, but by how teams respond when they do.

Effective project teams use new information to adjust their decisions and ways of working. When problems arise, the response is not to conceal them or assign blame, but to examine what happened, identify the underlying causes, and determine what needs to change. The objective is not simply to resolve each issue, but to use what execution reveals to drive continuous improvement, strengthen decision-making, and refine the plan itself.

I saw this dynamic firsthand in a core systems transformation project involving a globally diverse team, many of whom had limited systems development experience. Differences in culture, skills, and experience created significant coordination challenges from the outset. Rather than treating each issue as an isolated problem, the team repeatedly surfaced what was not working, reviewed its response, and adjusted how the project was managed. Over time, this iterative process improved both collaboration and the quality of decision-making, enabling the team to complete the project successfully.

The project succeeded not because the original plan was flawless or the team was fully formed from the outset, but because the team continually incorporated what it learned through execution into subsequent decisions and actions.

A Project Plan Is a Hypothesis, Not a Fixed Blueprint

Traditional project management often emphasizes minimizing delays and deviations from plan. Managing schedules, budgets, and deliverables is essential. Yet unexpected developments are inherent in any project, which limits the value of judging success solely by adherence to the original plan. More important is understanding why reality has diverged from initial assumptions and using what execution reveals to inform subsequent decisions.

A project plan should therefore be understood not as a finished blueprint to be followed through to completion, but as a hypothesis based on the best information available at the time. Execution tests that hypothesis. When new information reveals a gap between assumptions and reality, the plan needs to be updated. What ultimately shapes project outcomes is not the ability to avoid deviation, but the ability to revise the plan as reality unfolds.

For project managers, this changes the nature of the role. Their responsibility is not limited to keeping execution aligned with the plan. It also involves recognizing new information, determining what needs to change, and enabling the team to adjust course accordingly. Effective project management is therefore not simply about keeping reality aligned with the plan, but about keeping the plan aligned with reality.

How IGPI Can Help

Effective project management requires more than disciplined execution against a plan. It requires the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and incorporate new information without losing sight of strategic objectives.

IGPI's approach connects strategy with execution by continuously testing assumptions against reality, surfacing emerging issues, and translating new insights into decisions. This enables project teams to adapt as conditions change while maintaining strategic direction.

About the Author

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After joining Cap Gemini and Coca Cola, Kohki joined Revamp Corporation where he managed projects on global expansion and turnaround in various sectors including F&B, healthcare, retail, IT, etc. After joining IGPI, he has managed projects mainly on global expansion and cross border M&A in various sectors such as logistics, IT, telecom, retail, etc. In addition to his broad experience in implementing solutions that has been developed in Western countries, he has developed multiple methods to turnaround Asian companies with focus on setting clear vision and employee empowerment. Kohki has proven the practicality of these methods by turning around Asian companies not only as an advisor but also as senior management.

He graduated from Waseda University Department of Political Science and Economics and IE Business School.

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