ARE USERS OR DEVELOPERS TO BLAME FOR PROJECT FAILURE?

January 10th

The Veitch Room, Reed Hall, Exeter University.

It has been estimated that 70% of all systems project development costs are wasted due to delayed, unused or misunderstood systems facilities.

Reasons for failure are argued from the viewpoint of the developer and the user and the audience will be asked to decide how blame should be apportioned.

P Davies BA (Hons), FBCS, CITP, FCII
phild@talk21.com

Contents

1. Definition of users

In a commercial environment, a user is defined as any person who uses a computer system to fulfil a business function. Users work at all levels within an organisation and fall into three categories:

- **Direct users.** These are the regular day-to-day users that either update the systems or use them to answer customer enquiries. These direct users are, by definition, very close to the system.

- **Indirect users.** This category of staff will include middle managers and staff from other areas who use or gain benefits from the data provided, but have no responsibility for maintaining the data files.

- **Management users.** These are the higher management users who utilise the information provided to understand the ebb and flow of the business. Typically, such users will be management accountants, sales managers and directors who require to be kept informed of the principle business indicators. The management users are the most influential group.

There are also "regulatory users". This is where IT requirements are specified by law or a regulatory body. Examples are the requirement for commission disclosure for financial services products and , more recently, the Freedom of Information Act.

2. Definition of developers

Developers are defined as who develop or provide IT systems. There are more than you would think:

- Internal IT departments
- Package providers
- Outsourcing companies
- Application Service Providers
- Providers of system tools and facilities
- End users

3. Definition of Project Management

Project management is defined as the planning, organisation, monitoring and control of all aspects of a project and the motivation of all stakeholders to achieve the project objectives with the agreed time, cost and quality objectives. It is about how to develop a formal and proven approach to projects to ensure that they deliver the requirements. Also, it involves the coordinataion of other stakeholders to ensure success.

A project is a one-off activity that has a defined start point, a set of objectives, has outputs/deliverables (ie what is left behind when the project has been completed) and a defined end point.

4. How to know if a project is successful.

- Have the stated objectives been achieved?
- Has the project been delivered on time?
- Is the project within budget?
- Are the sponsors, the stakeholders and the intended beneficiaries satisfied?
- Does it meet the pre-defined success criteria?
- Does it meet the agreed level of quality?
- Does it provide value for money?

5. Users blame developers for:

- Not understanding the business
- Being interested only in technology
- Putting their careers first
- Developing incomplete systems or implementing inappropriate packages
- Developing error-prone systems
- Over-running timescales and cost estimates
- Poor planning
- Using unreliable technology
- Poor project management

6. Developers blame users for:

- No clear leadership
- Lack of top management support
- No inter-department assistance
- Failure to specify requirements adequately
- Unclear objectives
- Varying expectations
- Undefined roles and responsibilities
- Insufficient involvement by those affected
- Failure to listen
- Failure to schedule sufficient time for development or testing
- Requirements creep (Martini approach – any time, any place anywhere)
- Management bullying
- Over ambition
- Failure to learn from past mistakes
- Unpreparedness to revise plan to reflect reality

7. Exercise. Responsibilities - users and developers

AREA	RESPONSIBILITY
Determing business strategy	Users
Determining IT strategy	Developers and Users
Requesting projects	Users
Project leadership	Users or Developers
Project ownership	Users
Prioritisation with other work requests	Users with Developers
Preparation of system specification	Users with Developers
Systems development	Developers
Systems testing	Developers
User testing	Users
Acceptance testing and sign off	Users
User documentation	Users or Developers
Implementation	Users and Developers
Operation of system facilities	User
Post-implementation review	User

- **Exercise. How to avoid project failure**

- Use a development method
- Perform necessary risk assessment
- Manage all end user computing
- Involve appropriate personnel at all stages
- The chances for system success can be greatly increased by trying to anticipate potential problems and applying the appropriate corrective strategy
- The project management strategy should be adjusted according to the level of risk inherent in each project. If a project is placed in the proper risk category, the levels of risk can be anticipated in advance and strategies developed to counteract them.
- Sufficient time, money and resources must be allocated to research to ensure that the problems are clearly defined
- Sufficient time must be spent in the preliminary planning phase to ensure that the cost and duration of the project are estimated accurately
- The project team itself must be made up of enough staff who are sufficiently motivated and dedicated to the project
- MIS requirements must be derived from accurate and adequate documentation of existing systems (if any) and from systems research findings
- Users must spend time to help the project team gather the requisite information
- Users must be interviewed properly to ensure that the relevant questions are asked
- The system design must be flexible enough to serve future needs
- As the new system will bring changes, an organisational impact analysis needs to be carried out
- Enough time and money needs to be put aside for testing the system
- Users should be sufficiently involved in testing
- Training should commence well in advance of system installation
- The system should not be made operational before it is fully ready
- System and user documentation should be accurate and complete
- System should be regularly benchmarked against the original business objectives

- **Apportioning blame**

	Percentage
Percentage of blame apportioned to developers	59%
Percentage of blame apportioned to users	41%

(these percentages were arrived at following a survey of the 26 who attended the meeting)

- **How can the BCS prevent project failures**

  - Should provide project audit specialists
  - Should campaign for statutory project audits for large projects
  - Take further initiatives similar as ITIL