



# TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION: DREAM OR NIGHTMARE?

By Stephanie Maddocks



Technology and systems. They are stuff that dreams are made of — “This system will make my life easier, faster and better! I’ll leave my office at 5pm everyday!” — and the stuff of nightmares, too — “Remember when the system was down forever during our last upgrade and I didn’t sleep for days?” The difference between those two extremes is all in the planning and implementation process. And what is a process without a plan? (The answer to that question is chaos, by the way.)

Having been involved in more than 40 systems implementations, I have had first-hand experience with plan-less projects. Those are the projects that require overnight shipping because no one ordered the required pieces and parts. And the projects that require frantic last-minute phone calls back to the home office to get a “really technical resource” out on the next flight. Or the projects where engineers are writing code in their hotel rooms and bringing updates to the casino hourly. I guarantee that neither the casino nor the vendors were happy with the process or the outcome of these types of projects.

Simply enough, the one requirement for a successful project is a well developed and often-communicated **Project Plan** (capitalized, italicized and bolded to give it the proper respect it deserves).

The **Project Plan** is the most important part of a system implementation. This successful **Project Plan** is not just your usual project plan (you know, the one that is drawn up on a napkin at lunch one day). No, this **Project Plan** is the road map that will guide you to the successful completion of your project. If your current project plan only has these three components: find system, buy system and install system, start over right now.

## Key Stakeholders

The first portion of your **Project Plan** is to identify the key stakeholders. Who will this new technology affect? Which departments have a role in system selection, implementation, training, operations? What role do these team members need to play in the process? This is the opportunity to figure out who needs to be involved in the system selection process and give them a voice. Involving these key stakeholders as early as possible in the process provides the opportunity for them to participate and become accountable for project success.

One often-forgotten key stakeholder is your customer. How will any new system impact the experience he or she has at your casino? What will you ask of him or her during this process? Part of any **Project Plan** is change management, and any new system that touches guest service will require some change on the part of your customers. Consider how the communication of these changes will impact your customers and what you will be asking them to do.

## The Goal

The second portion of your **Project Plan** is the goal. Identify all the reasons you are willing to disrupt your operations in order to install new systems and technology. Will it save time? Will it save money? Will it make your customers happier? The goal will be your guiding principle as you begin to develop the **Project Plan**. Your goals will become the mission statement for the project and will help achieve the elusive “buy-in” from all interested parties. Once the team agrees with the goal, it is much more likely to proactively participate in the process to ensure project success.

Keep in mind that the goal does not have to be complicated and complex. It can be this simple, “We are upgrading our food and beverage point-of-sale system to provide improved guest service by allowing our guests to charge meals to their hotel rooms.” In the end, successful goals are easy to communicate and meet the SMART guidelines (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely). If

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your goal is to “save money” or “because management said so,” re-examine your purpose and objectives; those goals will most likely not achieve SMART outcomes.

## Getting There

So now you have your goal (or goals) that you’ve turned into the **Project Plan Mission**. The next step is to figure out what it is going to take to get you from where you are today to the successful completion of the project. And that is made up of all the tasks that will guide you on your journey. This is where “what you don’t know can hurt you” comes in. At this point, engage the assistance of your vendor or other experts in the industry to help you define the details of your **Project Plan**. By leveraging these resources, the **Project Plan** gains not only more tasks, but also an outsider’s point of view. Ask to see some of the project plans your vendors have used in the past. Multiple plans can be effective tools in providing guidance on the details required for a baseline plan.

At this point, re-engage the key stakeholders in the project. These departmental representatives bring their own levels of experience to the project; their input and acceptance will be integral to the project’s success. Ensure all departments that may be impacted by the new technology implementation have been included. It is possible that one department may be tempted to develop and implement a project plan without the involvement of other departments whose operations will be modified by the installation of the new system. Don’t give in to this temptation! Nothing about a technology implementation project can be done in a vacuum.

## Milestones

Once you have your task list completed, pinpoint the milestones that will be measure points for the plan. These tasks are guideposts that

identify project progress and current status, and are typically critical targets that impact other portions of the project. These will be the points that will determine which modifications need to be made to keep the project on track. As part of the milestone progression, create regular opportunities for project reviews involving the key stakeholders. Communication of the plan is integral to the plan’s success, and on-going status updates keep everyone informed of progress, as well as any challenges that require discussion and resolution.

In one of the most successful projects I’ve seen, the project manager kept a list of the week’s tasks on her whiteboard. Each task had the responsible team member’s name next to it, and each team member was responsible for updating his or her task status on the whiteboard each Friday. All project team members knew who was working on which elements, and what the current status was, at any given point in time.

## Empower a Champion

The last part of the successful **Project Plan** is the most important: empower a Project Champion. This team member will not only manage the project, but is also empowered to modify the plan, to communicate the plan and any changes, and to assign tasks to the appropriate resources. The Project Champion has the responsibility to administer the **Project Plan**’s tasks and milestones, identify the team members who are accountable for each task, and ensure on-time completion by all participating project team members. Ideally, the Project Champion is

an organized communicator who can balance multiple tasks and interact effectively with all levels of team members within your organization. A Project Champion may not necessarily be one of your current team members; many installations effectively capitalize on the experience of vendors’ project managers or outside experts to manage technology implementation projects. The successful Project Champion necessarily owns the project and the process to achieve successful completion, interacting with the multiple departments that are affected by the technology implementation project.

## The Short Version

For those of you who prefer the shorthand version of a successful **Project Plan**:

- Identify Key Stakeholders
- Develop the Project Goal
- Define Tasks and Milestones
- Empower a Project Champion

Take the time to build the plan, and your organization will be well on its way to a successful technology implementation. Good luck!



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