

The Project Saboteur

Turning Project Failure into Project Success

Jeroen Gietema & Dion Kotteman



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About the Authors

Dion Kotteman has extensive project management experience in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. He worked as the Chief Information Officer of the Dutch Government, then as an executive advisor to the Dutch Minister of Finance, and is now a consultant and a non-executive board member of companies. His working history includes general manager of the Dutch National Audit Authority, and an executive in the banking world, mainly in IT and security. He was responsible for major change projects for the government of the Netherlands and in the Dutch financial sector. He headed up computerisation projects for the Netherlands Ministry of Justice and was responsible for a number of large European projects. He has also worked as a commissioner of police for Interpol and Europol. Since 1997, he has worked for several large banks including ING and ABN AMRO, where he concentrated on information security dealing with international concerns. At ING, he was programme director.

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Jeroen Gietema has more than thirty years project and management experience in the field of information and communication technology. After studying computer technique he worked for Volmac and Capgemini. With Capgemini Jeroen worked as Division Quality manager and Deputy Area Quality Manager. In addition to his work he studied business science.

In 1997 he started to work as an independent IT management consultant.

In his role as IT management consultant Jeroen headed up large computerisation projects, was responsible for quality, requirements and supplier management and consulted in the area of logistic service

provision. Jeroen specialised and is actively involved in Agile development of complex software solutions. He gained his experience in large financial, governmental, industrial and logistic organisations.

Since 2011 Jeroen has been co-owner and CEO of Cedira BV, a company that develops and provides web-based solutions and management consulting services. The most important web-based service developed under his responsibility is ProSpondo, an assessment and impact analysis engine with advanced analytical and reporting capabilities.

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Based on their extensive experience in getting projects to succeed, Jeroen Gietema and Dion Kotteman wrote *The Project Saboteur* and *The Project Saboteur and PRINCE2*. *The Project Saboteur* is available in Dutch, German and English. They are regularly invited to give lectures about the human factor on project failure. They explain how to recognise saboteurs as well as how to implement effective defence mechanisms.

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Jeroen Gietema & Dion Kotteman
Nieuwegein and The Hague, January 2016

Foreword

On March 4, 1921, Warren Gamaliel Harding became the 29th President of the United States. If remembered at all, Harding is remembered for the first major presidential scandal, known as Teapot Dome. The Teapot Dome was a scandal involving Harding's Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall. Fall did a secret leasing deal for federal oil reserves and got kickbacks from Sinclair Oil. Harding was slow to take action and let Congress do most of the investigation, which ultimately led to Fall's conviction. In response to the scandal, Harding is reported to have made these immortal remarks: "I have no trouble with my enemies, but my damn friends, they're the ones that keep me walking the floor nights!"

Projects in general and software projects in particular are all about change. Change will have an impact on different people in different ways. Change also causes fear and uncertainty. It is a rare project that does not have detractors. Dion Kotteman and Jeroen Gietema's Project Saboteur provides insight into how some people may react to changes they perceive as unfavorable to their position and place. In most cases people will act in their own self-interest and preservation. This book will help you make decisions through understanding their behavior and motivation. Project managers can use this new understanding to help in the control and management of the project. Executive sponsors will find helpful hints for neutralizing or transforming the project saboteur to help move the project forward.

A Roman gladiator's purpose was to fight well in hopes of either beating his opponent or gaining a reprieve to fight another day. In most cases the combatants were set up so that each had a different advantage either for close combat or a distant struggle to make the fight more interesting and show off the latest martial arts. Each gladiator clearly knew his opponent. Bob Kelley, serial CIO, related an ERP systems project that had its own gladiator. There was one woman in purchasing who openly refused to help with the implementation and she put up a fight. She went so far as to poison the well for the other people. The organization gave her the thumbs down and helped her

Introduction

retire with a nice severance package. Unfortunately, project saboteurs are not always so aboveboard. They exhibit a more passive-aggressive approach. They are more likely to give you a bear hug before stabbing you in the back.

The first thing you need to do is recognize the project saboteur. This book helps you recognize the habits and behaviors of a potential saboteur. Once you recognize a project saboteur, managing her or him is crucial to the project. The big takeaways from this book are the tools to be able to deal with the potential saboteur without hurting the project or your career. This book is both fun to read and insightful. However, you will no longer look at the people in the project meeting in the same way, but you will have the awareness to not be blindsided by the project saboteur. You need to keep your enemies close, but your friends closer. Hopefully you will not be walking the floor nights.

Jim Johnson
Dreamer
The Standish Group

It's just not fair. There are plenty of books about how to carry out projects brilliantly, but there are no books about destroying them underhandedly — although projects are constantly and intentionally doomed to oblivion.

It is about time that the project saboteurs were given the proper tool: a book that explains how you can destroy a project.

It is not easy to leave the well-trodden path. Much of the advice given in the world of management – but also elsewhere — seems intent on keeping you on the straight and narrow. That is hardly surprising; after all, the world will be better for it.

Only when we leave the well-trodden path do we see things that remain hidden from others, and only then do we discover a new perspective on an age-old theme. Only then do we realise that it is well worth describing how to undermine a project — and how extremely educational that is. Educational not only for the saboteur, but also for you, to arm yourself against these saboteurs and their undermining actions.

“Look like th’ innocent flower, but be the serpent under ‘t”

Shakespeare, Macbeth Act 1, scene 5

This book begins with the introduction to the project saboteur, his motives and his approaches. Or her motives and approaches. Because if there's one place where there's gender equity, it's in sabotage and counter-sabotage. For the sake of ease, let's say they're all men: the saboteurs, their victims and the well-armed counter-saboteurs (even though they're not!). The book then continues by placing the director, the project manager, the user, the specialist and the member of the Joint Consultative Committee in the role of project saboteur. The book

ends with a conspiracy in which the saboteurs form a criminal organisation in order to torpedo a project. To show how project saboteurs practice their undermining activities in real life we enriched the book with a number of cases based on true facts; to protect those successful saboteurs we provided them with new names and new sceneries to perform their hideous acts.

You might get the idea that sabotage is everywhere and nothing can be done about it. The first is true, but the second isn't. You can certainly do something about this. The main goal of this book is to make you aware of this phenomenon called project sabotage. It is there, believe us. To help you in your battle against these saboteurs, we end each chapter with a section on how to recognise the saboteur and prevent him from being successful. You can read these sections separately; it will give you a clear approach of how to prevent project failure due to project sabotage. That should make life easier!

Finally, based on some interesting publications, we challenge the commonly accepted causes for project failure. By analysing publications, concerning several failed projects, it becomes clear that the human factor is an important reason why these projects failed. But, funny enough, not recognised as such.

Look at this: Was it so hard to build a new airport in Berlin, the Brandenburger Airport? It had an overrun of billions. (www.berlin-airport.de)

Was it not possible to give MI5 a proper record management system? (*The Independent* May 12th 2013).

The BBC has scrapped a £98m digital production system, which its director general said had “wasted a huge amount of licence fee payers’ money”. The Digital Media Initiative was set up in 2008 but was halted last autumn having never become fully operational. Mrs Hodge (chair of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee) described the episode as ‘a terrible shock and clearly completely shambolic’. (BBC News Site, 22651126)

Europe does not have the monopoly on project failure. According to the 2015 Standish CHAOS report, the overall project success rate in North America was only 31% with 18% of the projects failing completely.

It's about time to look into the real reason of project failure.

1 | The project saboteur

Each project has its opponents. Everybody knows them — people who, for one reason or another, have a self-interest in having a project fail. But these opponents are often amateurs. They just mess around. Do they know the best way to attack a project in a properly structured way? No, of course they don't! There are courses for project managers, but there's nothing similar for project saboteurs. The saboteurs have to do it as they see fit; there is absolutely no support for amateur saboteurs who want to become true professionals. This book redresses the balance, by explaining how you can undermine a project efficiently, effectively, but most importantly, professionally. Not by occasionally saying you disagree, but working in a subtle, thorough and irresistible way on the destruction of the project. Not empty words, but planned action. The idea that planning is somehow reserved to the project manager is nonsense. Effective subversive action needs good planning. And the plan must be professionally implemented. That's what this book is about.

Why would anybody want to undermine a project?

Some project saboteurs are convinced that the project is bad for the company and they will do anything to protect the company from making a mistake. Others believe that if the project fails, employment will be protected.

And there are other, less noble motives: the failure of a project offers the saboteur the chance of improving his position or of encouraging people to move on to other things: generally by beating a hasty retreat by the back door.

The dominant motive is survival; a budding saboteur comes to the conclusion that the project could result in him losing his job. And he's not going to let that happen. He has to put up some resistance, otherwise who will pay for his car, his mortgage and his children's education? He, so obviously indispensable, is in danger of becoming superfluous.

"Food is the first thing, morals follow on"

B. Brecht: The Threepenny Opera
Ballad on the question: What Keeps Mankind Alive?

It's about time that this important player, the project saboteur, is provided with professional tools that will allow him to successfully undermine any project he wishes.

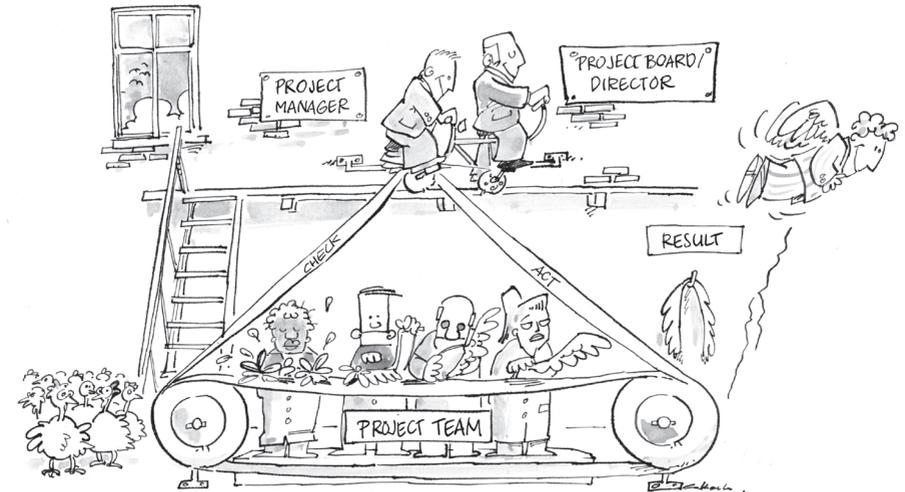


In essence, a project is extremely simple, and so, too, is its destruction. Many trainers and organisations that supply expensive project managers are not likely to agree with this. In project management training, people succeed in portraying projects as exceptionally complex, when in fact they are really fairly simple. There is a director, who states that a certain result (a change or a product) is necessary. Then there is a project manager, who brings the assignment to a successful conclusion within the time and budget allocated. He draws

up a plan for this and hires specialists. The project manager asks the users what they would like to have and whether they can work with the result. Now and again, he reports the progress of the project to the director. The agreed result is delivered and accepted by the director. And that's it.

In his efforts to undermine the project, the professional project saboteur makes use of the very elements that the project manager should use to keep it under control: assignment, plan, reporting and result.

The project saboteur has it a lot easier than the project manager; the saboteur knows the project manager, but the project manager does not know who the saboteur is. The project manager must report and communicate verifiable facts; the project saboteur need only insinuate suspicions.



It will by now be clear that the project saboteur has purely human motives for committing his deed. We need only refer to Maslow and his behavioural pyramid. See Appendix B for more information on Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Motivation, however, is not enough for bringing about the failure of a project; there must also be opportunities. The saboteur must have formal or informal influence. Or both. Formal influence is something you derive from your position. Informal influence is derived from your knowledge or social position.

If, for example, the saboteur is the manager of the department for which the project result is intended, then there is a good chance that he is the person responsible for accepting the result. This is an ideal position from which to frustrate both the demands placed on the project result and the acceptance of it. If the saboteur is an expert or a specialist, he not only has possibilities for questioning the proposed solutions but also for combating the actual need for the project. If, as a result of his knowledge as a specialist, he ends up in the project team, his possibilities are virtually endless.

Even if his influence is not based on knowledge or hierarchy, the saboteur can still bring about the downfall of a project. To do this, he needs an informal access to the formal project network. He must be able to influence the formal process. He can acquire this position by cozying up to the real players in the process, creating bonds of trust and friendship. After all, friends do not doubt each others' motives and always take each other seriously.

Intake of the project saboteur

Would you like to know whether you have what it takes to be a saboteur, whether you have the motives and the possibilities to make a project fall flat on its face? Then you should take the following self-assessment.

Question	Answer	Yes points	Score potential saboteur
Have I the proper motives?			
▪ If the project succeeds:	<input type="checkbox"/> No problem	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll probably lose my job	3	
	<input type="checkbox"/> My career will come to a dead end	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll take over from my boss	0	
▪ If the project fails:	<input type="checkbox"/> No problem	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll probably lose my job	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll keep my position in the company	3	
	<input type="checkbox"/> The company will go bankrupt within a year	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll take over from my boss	2	
▪ If I lose my job	<input type="checkbox"/> I can quickly find a job with another company	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I'm too old to be considered for a job with another company	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not have the qualifications to get a job with another company	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will have to sell my house	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will lose the respect of my partner	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will lose the respect of my family and friends	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will lose the respect of my family and friends	2	
▪ If my career comes to a dead end in the company	<input type="checkbox"/> I'll lose my influence	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will lose the respect of my partner	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I will lose the respect of my family and friends	1	
Do I have the right mentality (Conscience)?			
▪ It doesn't bother me	<input type="checkbox"/> If a colleague is fired	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> If a colleague is falsely blamed	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> To tell a lie to my own advantage	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> To manipulate reports to my own advantage	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> To manipulate reports to the disadvantage of a colleague	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> If I am the cause of a colleague being fired	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Using somebody else to carry out my actions so that I keep out of the firing line	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Using somebody else to carry out my actions so that I keep out of the firing line	2	
▪ I am proud	<input type="checkbox"/> If I am rewarded for a colleague's idea	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> If I can blame a colleague for my own failings	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> If a colleague passes off my idea as his own	-2	

Do I have sufficient influence in the organisation?			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People consider me 	<input type="checkbox"/> A specialist	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> A do-er	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Somebody to fetch the coffee	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> A manager	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Needy?	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The following statement applies to me 	<input type="checkbox"/> People listen to me	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> My ideas are often adopted	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> People don't often take me seriously	0	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I am trusted by people on the work floor	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> The board of management takes me into its confidence	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> My boss regularly asks me for my opinion	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> My colleagues eagerly follow my advice	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I have a lot of informal contacts	2	
	Do I have sufficient knowledge?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The following statement applies to me 	<input type="checkbox"/> I fully understand the company processes	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I know my colleagues' quality	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I know who has what influence within the organisation	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I know the preferences and aversions of the most important people in the organisation	2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project approach 	<input type="checkbox"/> I understand the way projects are run	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I can and will make the project process my own	1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I know what the requirements/acceptance criteria are	2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> I know what the role of project manager entails	1	
	Am I up for it?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do I want the project to fail? 	<input type="checkbox"/> No	-30	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes - and I'm going to see it does	30	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but I've no time to see that it does	-30	
TOTAL (maximum 100)			

If you scored more than 70 points then you have passed your entrance exam as 'project saboteur'. This book is a must for you. If you scored less, then reading this book will help you recognise your undermining friends and colleagues, and arm yourself against them.

How to identify the project saboteur

If not the failure but the success of the project is your goal, it is worthwhile to analyse if it is in someone's interest to manipulate your project. Is this often done? No! Is this difficult? Not really.

By wrapping the 'intake of the project saboteur' questionnaire in the frame work of the stakeholder analysis you own the perfect instrument to investigate which of your potential project opponents are likely to take action against the project success.

Each stakeholder analysis starts by determining the position of the stakeholders in the spectrum from Supporter to Opponent. After identifying the position of the stakeholders you apply the questionnaire per stakeholder.



Only if the stakeholder has the right motivation, the competence, and also the opportunity to manipulate a project, is it to be expected that he will take action to undermine the project's results.

As the position of your stakeholders might change during the course of the project, it is wise to regularly renew the project manipulation stakeholder analysis.

In the chapters regarding the players, we give you the preventive measures.

IT Project success and failure in 2015

The Standish group reported on project results in 2015. 25.000 projects were assessed against the resolution definition: OnTime, OnBudget and satisfactory result.

The IT Project success rate as presented in this report is rather low: in 2015 only 29% of the software development projects were considered to be successful, meaning that these projects delivered OnTime, OnBudget, with a satisfactory result. 52% of the projects were listed with the qualification challenged and 19% failed completely. What is even more amazing is that the project success rate doesn't show any improvement over the years. In 2011 too 29% of the projects were considered to be successful and 22% of the projects failed.

Let's combine the Standish CHAOS figures with some Gartner publications.

According to Gartner in 2015 \$3.5 trillion will be spent on IT worldwide. Approximately 19% is spent on change. This represents an amount of approximately \$665 billion spend worldwide on IT projects. The logical conclusion is that \$126 billion of this amount goes down the drain each year due to project failure. If you add to this amount to the inefficiency costs of challenged projects we assume that the sum lost on projects each year is in the order of magnitude of least \$300 billion.

Software development projects are clearly in chaos, and we can no longer imitate the three monkeys: hear no failures, see no failures, speak no failures!

Of course, the Standish figures have been challenged here and there, but there is overwhelming proof that projects are not as successful as we want them to be.

Want to know the underlying causes and what we can do to improve?

Continue reading this book!.

Sources used: Standish group Chaos report 2015; Transforming the business - Gartner 2003; Worldwide IT Spending Forecast - Gartner 2015