Conditions for
project success

APM research report

apm

The **voice** of the
PROFESSION

About the research

APM's research to identify the conditions for project success asked:

25

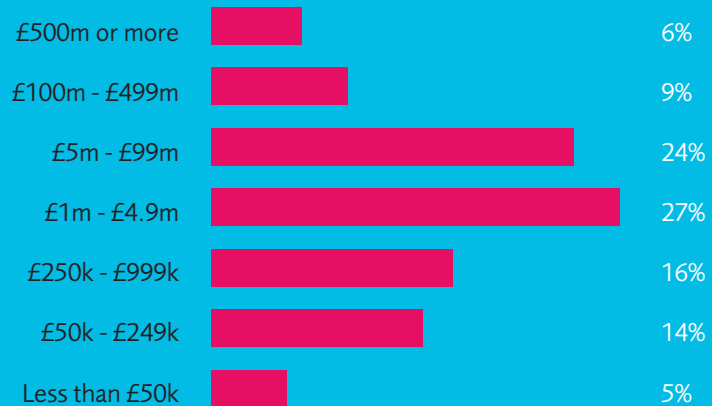leading project management professionals and academics to define an initial framework of success factors

862

project practitioners to test the validity and relevance of APM's framework of success factors

Age distribution of survey respondents

Age	%
55-64 years	15%
45-54 years	31%
35-44 years	23%
25-34 years	11%
16-24 years	1%
Not known*	19%

Value of respondents' most recent completed project

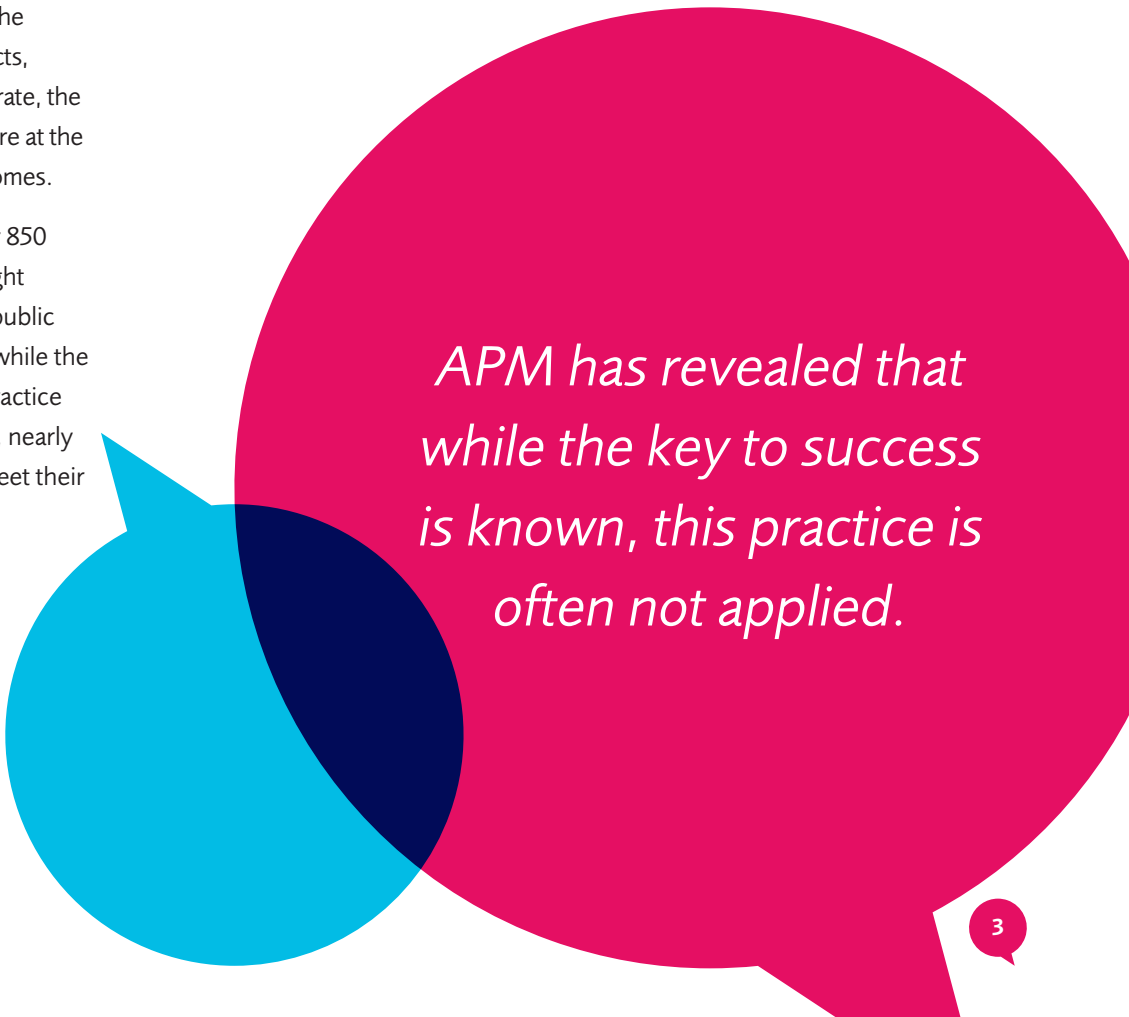| Value	%
£500m or more	6%
£100m - £499m	9%
£5m - £99m	24%
£1m - £4.9m	27%
£250k - £999k	16%
£50k - £249k	14%
Less than £50k	5%

Introduction

Trillions of pounds are invested in projects, programmes and portfolios every year. The cost of failure can have a catastrophic effect on the economy, environment, and society.

Research by the Association for Project Management (APM) – a leading voice in the profession – reveals that the environment in which the projects, programmes and portfolios operate, the conditions for project success, are at the heart of improving project outcomes.

And yet, having spoken to over 850 project professionals and thought leaders across the private and public sector, APM has revealed that while the key to success is known, this practice is often not applied. As a result, nearly 80% of projects fail to wholly meet their planned objectives.

This report reveals the key to project success and the impact that the failure to apply this knowledge can have on projects, programmes and portfolios.

The full research report can be downloaded from **apm.org.uk/ publications**

APM has revealed that while the key to success is known, this practice is often not applied.

APM's **12** project success factors

These 12 factors provide a framework for project success that defines the environment in which projects can be delivered successfully. Each of the 12 was identified as playing a crucial role in the formation and delivery of the project.

1 Effective governance
The project has clearly identified leadership; responsibilities; reporting lines and communications between all parties.

4 Capable sponsors
Sponsors play an active role in the life cycle of the project; they assume ultimate responsibility and accountability for the project outcomes.

2 Goals and objectives
The overall goal of the project is clearly specified and recognised by all stakeholders; it is not in conflict with subsidiary objectives and project leaders have a clear vision of the project outcomes.

5 Secure funding
The project has a secure funding base; contingency funding is recognised from the start and tight control of budgets is in place to ensure maximum value is realised.

3 Commitment to project success
All parties involved in the project are and remain committed to the project's success; any lack of commitment is recognised and dealt with and project leadership inspires commitment in others.
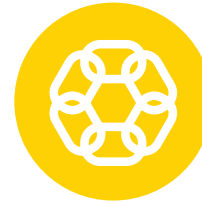
6 Project planning and review
Pre-project planning is thorough and considered; there is regular and careful progress monitoring; the project has realistic time schedules, active risk management and a post-project review.

7 Supportive organisations

The environment in which the project operates is project-friendly; the organisation provides support and resourcing for project activity (including financing) and access to stakeholders.

8 End users and operators

End users or operators are engaged in the design of the project; the project team engages with users, who are able to take on what the project has produced effectively and efficiently.

9 Competent project teams

Project professionals forming a core team are fully competent; other team members are also fully competent and the project team engages in positive behaviours which encourage success.

10 Aligned supply chain

All direct and indirect suppliers are aware of project needs, schedules and quality standards. Higher and lower tiers of supply chains are coordinated.

11 Proven methods and tools

Good practice project management tools, methods and techniques are applied in a way which maintains an effective balance between flexibility and robustness.

12 Appropriate standards

Quality standards are actively used to drive quality of outputs. Adherence to other standards is regularly monitored in order to ensure delivery is to best practice levels.

Project success

The research revealed just how successful respondents' most recent project had been. While over 90% considered their project to be, to some degree, successful, just 22% of projects wholly met their original objectives. The results also show that around 1 in 8 projects failed to meet their budget and around 1 in 6 failed to deliver on time. Taken overall, though, projects are far more likely to succeed than not, with only 6% of projects proving wholly unsuccessful.
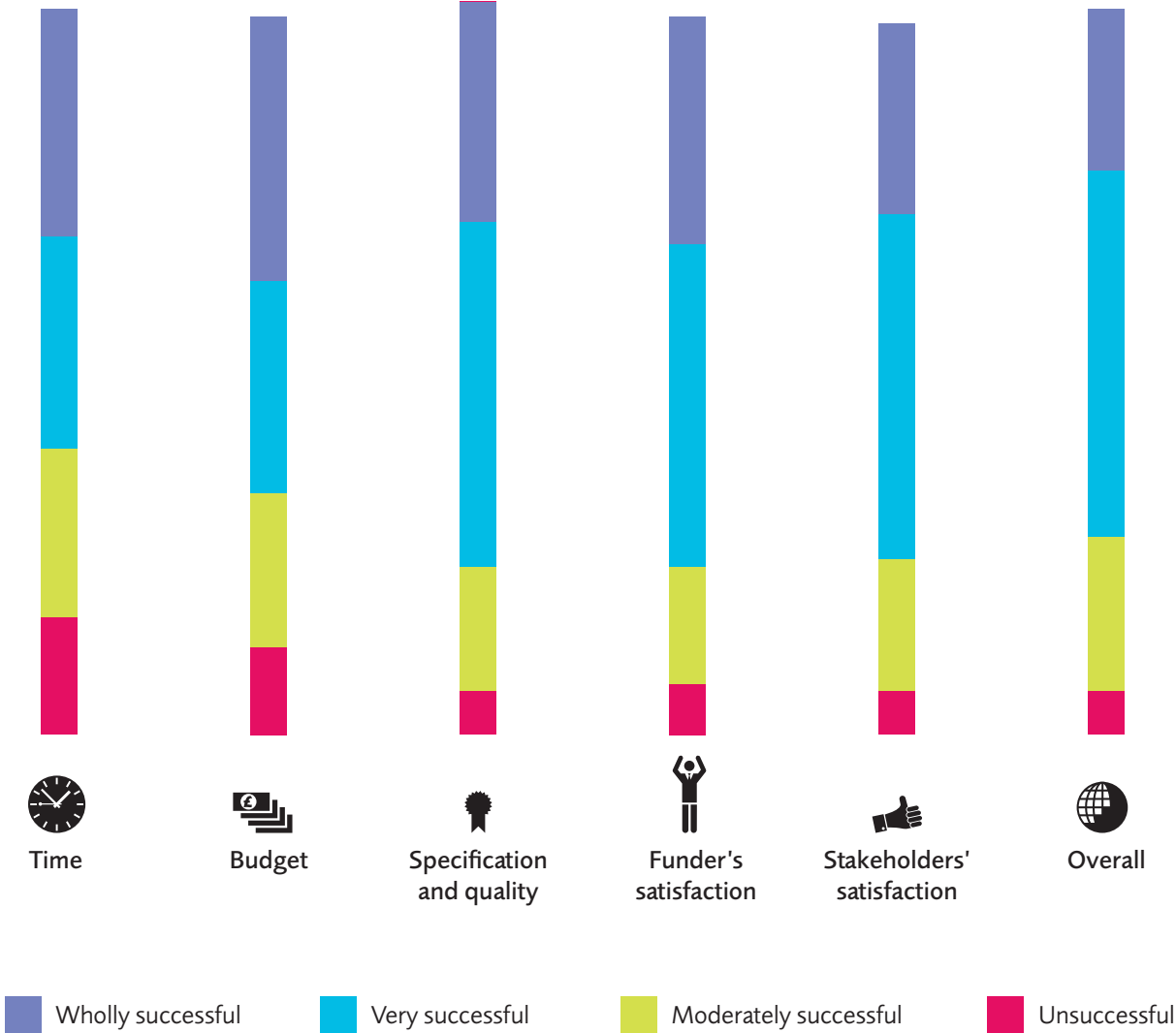
1 in 8 *projects failed to meet their budget*

22% *of projects are wholly successful*

Levels of success in recent projects

Time   Budget   Specification and quality   Funder's satisfaction   Stakeholders' satisfaction   Overall

■ Wholly successful   ■ Very successful   ■ Moderately successful   ■ Unsuccessful

Common success factors

Respondents were asked to rate the factors commonly found in their recent successful projects. Competent project teams and effective governance both score highly; over 50% in each case said it was either excellent or very good. Other positives include proven methods and tools and secure funding, which are ranked highest in terms of excellence. However, both register highly on the absent/poor rating, suggesting a potential source of conflict. Worryingly, only 4% said planning and review was excellent, while 14% said it was poor or missing altogether.

Subsidiary success factors in recent projects

Most present

- The project has a secure funding base where the decision to start is taken

- Project professionals heading up or forming a core team are fully committed

- The overall goal of the project is clearly specified and recognised by all stakeholders

Least present

- The organisation provides embedded support for project activity

- Higher and lower tiers of supply chains are co-ordinated

- Post-project review is undertaken to learn lessons for the future

87%
rated competent project teams critical/very important

Success factors in recently completed projects

	Excellent	Very good	Moderately good	Absent/poor
Competent project teams				
Effective governance				
Proven methods and tools				
Secure funding				
Goals and objectives				
End users and operators				
Commitment to project success				
Supportive organisation				
Appropriate standards				
Capable sponsors				
Aligned supply chain				
Project planning and review				
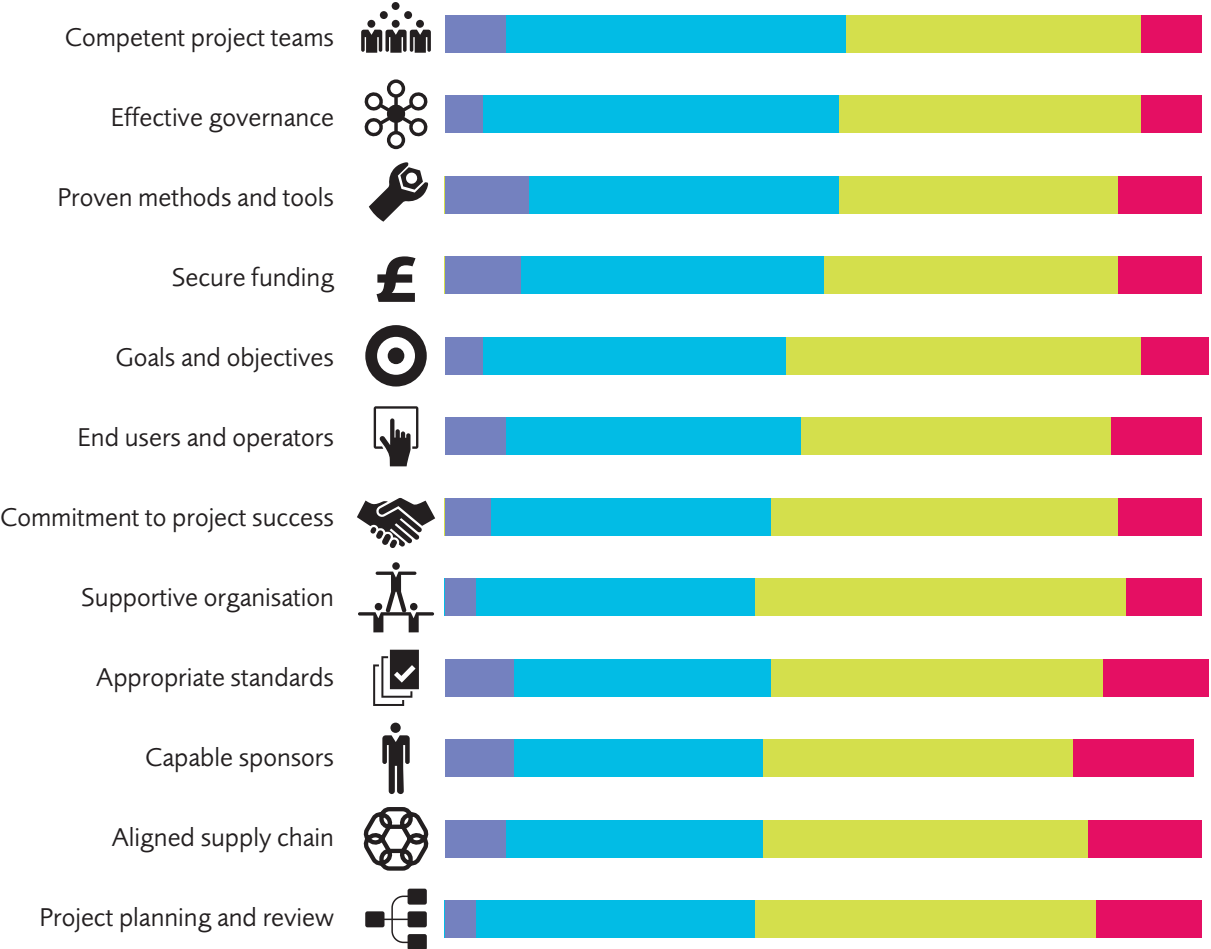
Excellent   Very good   Moderately good   Absent/poor

The application of good practice – I

The factors with the highest bearing on success are clear goals and objectives, project planning and review and effective governance, which all occupy at least two of the top three places on each of the six measures. To deliver on time, effective governance is essential; and, unsurprisingly, clear goals and objectives are seen as essential to meeting quality and specification goals. The overall project success measure gives a good indication of what needs to be in place to create the right conditions for success.

Relationships between project success measures and headline success factors

Success measure

Time

Budget

Specification and quality

Funder satisfaction

Stakeholder satisfaction

Overall project success

92%

said goals should be clearly specified

GREATER

LESSER

Effective governance	Project planning and review	Commitment to project success	Goals and objectives	Supportive organisations	Competent project teams	Proven methods
Project planning and review	Effective governance	Goals and objectives	Proven methods	Supportive organisations	Competent project teams	Commitment to project success
Goals and objectives	Effective governance	Project planning and review	Competent project teams	Appropriate standards	Commitment to project success	End users and operators
Goals and objectives	Effective governance	Commitment to project success	Project planning and review	Supportive organisations	Competent project teams	End users and operators
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Project planning and review	Goals and objectives	Effective governance	Competent project teams	Commitment to project success	Supportive organisations	End users and operators

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The application of good practice – II

The research revealed the degree to which projects and programmes frequently fail because of a failure to apply the key elements of the optimum project environment. The factor with the biggest red flag is project planning and review. Other factors revealed as important but less likely to be in place are goals and objectives and effective governance. More encouragingly, competent project teams is both important and frequently in place.

- **More likely** than average to be important/more likely than average to be in place: competent project teams; effective governance

- **More likely** than average to be important/less likely than average to be in place: project planning and review
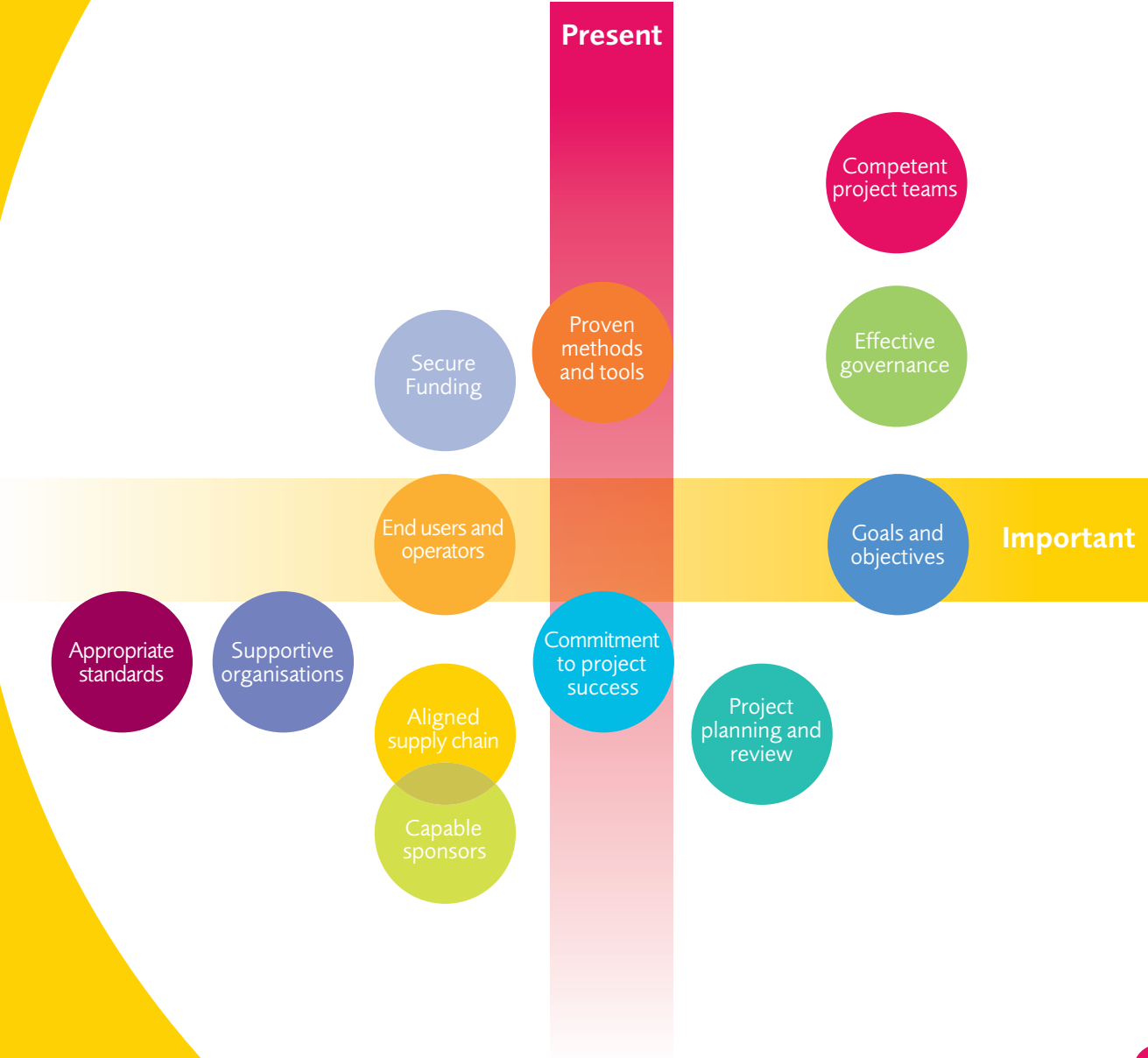
- **Less likely** than average to be important/more likely than average to be in place: secure funding

- **Less likely** than average to be important/less likely than average to be in place: aligned supply chain; capable sponsors.

88%

said effective governance was important

**The extent to which success
factors were in place in recent projects**

Present

Competent
project teams

Proven
methods
and tools

Secure
Funding

Effective
governance

End users and
operators

Goals and
objectives

Important

Appropriate
standards

Supportive
organisations

Commitment
to project
success

Aligned
supply chain

Project
planning and
review

Capable
sponsors

Conclusions

Our findings raise a number of issues for consideration. The average ratings which respondents gave to their most recently completed project were high – almost all being in the 8 out of 10 range. This suggests overall project delivery is in a healthy place.

Furthermore, the elements of the framework associated with project success – and the extent to which project professionals said these factors were in place in their recent projects – was also positive.

However, there are gaps in key areas, most notably, project planning and review. The research reveals this as an essential factor but is less likely to be evident in recent projects.

The good news is that from the research it is possible to draw out five factors which, when taken together, make a significant contribution to creating the optimum project environment, otherwise known as the conditions for project success.

89%

said all parties are/remain committed to success

5 things to get right...

The following five factors could be viewed as a formula for success; get these right and the rest should follow...

Project planning and review

Pre-project planning should be thorough and considered, with monitoring and review throughout the project.

Goals and objectives

The overall goal of the project should be clearly specified and recognised by all stakeholders involved in the project.

Effective governance

The project needs to have clear reporting lines and regular communications between all parties.

Competent project teams

The project professionals leading, or forming a core team, need to be fully competent.

Commitment to project success

All parties involved in the project must be, and remain, committed to the project's success.

Association for Project Management

Ibis House, Regent Park	**Telephone**	+44 (0) 845 458 1944
Summerleys Road	**Facsimile**	+44 (0) 845 458 8807
Princes Risborough	**Email**	info@apm.org.uk
Buckinghamshire HP27 9LE	**Web**	apm.org.uk