

Background

Is your IT project doomed to fail?

When was the last time you saw an unfinished bridge, the construction abandoned and the structure **crumbling**? When was the last time you heard of a bridge collapsing? Was there a huge enquiry into what happened? Can you imagine a bridge being built without clear plans, expectation and budgets? IT projects should be like building bridges – completed on time, within budget, and if they fail to be finalized or break down once in operation, there should be an enquiry into what went wrong. Unfortunately IT projects are not treated like bridge-building projects and when they go wrong failures are often covered up, ignored, and/or **rationalized**.

According to the latest Standish Group report, an incredible 83 % of all IT projects are not completed successfully. The Standish Group have been **assessing** IT projects since 1985 and passing on the information to companies looking to avoid making the same mistakes. The Standish Group categorizes IT projects in three ways: 'success', 'challenged', and 'failure'. Those which are delivered on time and within budget are classed as 'success'. These projects may have fallen behind schedule, gone over budget or perhaps not all of the original specifications were met. Finally, there are those projects that are classed as 'failure'. These have been abandoned or cancelled, and left hanging like our unfinished bridge.

Raquel Mendes, a project management consultant based in Hong Kong, blames project managers themselves. 'Project managers should be prepared to **stand up to** the client,' advises Mendes. 'Often meeting the client's objectives is the top priority for project

managers no matter how unrealistic these demands are. If you ignore time and cost limitations while allowing the client to push the limits, the project is **doomed to** failure from the outset.' 4

Gregor McCleish, an IT specialist from Scotland, claims lack of research and planning is the biggest reason why projects fail. 'I've seen it so many times, halfway through the project the business people realize that what the IT people are doing is not going to fit their requirements and they abandon the whole process.

Therefore, McCleish advises that the researchers have to get the requirements right and make sure specifications are **clear-cut** and complete.

Industry specialist Monica Muth claims that 40 % of project failure is caused by poor communication between the end user and the provider. 'If you look at successful projects it is clear that the end user is involved all the way through the development process,' claims Muth. 'End users should be consulted at regular stages throughout. If users are kept in the dark until they receive a neatly packaged product then the project is bound to fail.

All projects have challenges such as deadlines, budget **constraints** and manpower concerns, but IT projects have other challenges ranging from technological issues caused by hardware, operating system, network or database problems, to security risks and system breakdowns. But, all our experts agree that IT project failures cost companies billions of pounds a year so whatever the cause, failed IT projects deserve the same **scrutiny** as a collapsed bridge.

Reading file 3

Exercises

1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 What has been the most successful project you have worked on? What made it successful?
- 2 What things can cause a project to fail?

2 You are going to read a text about IT projects. Read the text quickly and decide who or what these things are / what they do.

- 1 The Standish Group
- 2 Raquel Mendes
- 3 Gregor McCleish
- 4 Monica Muth

3 Match sentences a–g to gaps 1–7 to complete the text.

- a Opinions differ as to why projects fail.
- b Maybe IT projects fail because they are just harder to manage than other projects like bridge building.
- c In other words, project managers have to learn how to say 'no'.
- d As a result, there is never a chance to learn from the mistakes and avoid them in the future.
- e The third reason is communication.
- f Otherwise the specifications keep changing throughout the process, meaning the project grows out of control.
- g Those, which are finally realized but have had problems are classed as 'challenged'.

4 Read the text one more time and answer the following questions in your own words.

- 1 What point is the writer making by comparing bridge-building and IT projects?
- 2 What's the difference between the three categories used by the Standish Group?
- 3 According to Raquel Mendes, what factors will cause a project to fail?
- 4 Does Gregor McCleish give similar advice to Raquel?
- 5 What is the one thing all the experts agree on?

5 Match the words in bold in the text to each definition.

- 1 definite and easy to see or identify: _____
- 2 to find, or try to find, a logical reason to explain why somebody or something thinks, behaves, etc. in a way that is difficult to understand: _____
- 3 carefully and thoroughly examining: _____
- 4 to resist somebody; to not accept bad treatment without complaining: _____
- 5 make somebody or something certain to fail, suffer, die, etc.: _____
- 6 breaking or breaking something into very small pieces: _____
- 7 limits or restrictions on something: _____
- 8 making a judgement about the nature or quality of somebody or something: _____

6 Work with a partner. Try to use each word from 5 in a sentence about yourself / your work.

7 Choose three words from the text that you think are useful for you now.

8 Do you think the article is a fair account of the success of IT projects?