

Ten Facts

that shape

Project Delivery

Achieve P3M

What the Evidence Says

Ten verified findings, and how to use them



Most delivery debates run on opinion. These ten findings run on evidence. They draw on the Standish Group, Bent Flyvbjerg, PMI, the UK National Audit Office and the Victorian Auditor-General, and point to one conclusion: project outcomes are shaped by human, behavioural and organisational factors.

Every quote is reproduced word for word from its source, with the author and document named. Each fact ends with a practical way to use it, whether you are challenging a business case, briefing a sponsor or shaping your next capability uplift.

American spellings are kept as published.

Start with the Base Rate & Safe Sizing

1. FULL SUCCESS IS RARE

"Over Budget, Over Time, Under Benefits, Over and Over Again"

Flyvbjerg and Gardner, *How Big Things Get Done* (2023).

47.9% of projects land on budget, 8.5% on budget and time, and 0.5% on budget, time and benefits.

Pro Tip: open every business case review with this base rate in mind. Do not ignore historical evidence.

2. SIZE PREDICTS OUTCOME

"It was clear from the very beginning of the CHAOS research that size was the single most important factor in the resolution of project outcome."

The Standish Group, *CHAOS Report* 2015.

Small projects succeeded 61% of the time, grand projects 6%.

Pro Tip: break large initiatives into small, value-delivering increments and fund them in stages.



Who Leads & How We Plan

Sponsorship and estimating decide outcomes early



3. THE SPONSOR MATTERS MOST

"The No. 1 Factor of Success is a skilled executive sponsor."

The Standish Group, CHAOS Report 2015.

Its model weights executive sponsorship at 15 points, the joint highest, and project management expertise at 5.

Pro Tip: assess sponsor capability at initiation, and invest in sponsor education, induction and coaching.

4. PLANS IGNORE HISTORY

"Base rate neglect is identified as a primary reason that projects underperform."

Bent Flyvbjerg, Top Ten Behavioral Biases in Project Management, Project Management Journal (2021).

Across 1,603 of the 2,062 projects studied, costs overran by 39% on average.

Pro Tip: Build a reference class within your organisation and use it to aid forecasting of similar projects.

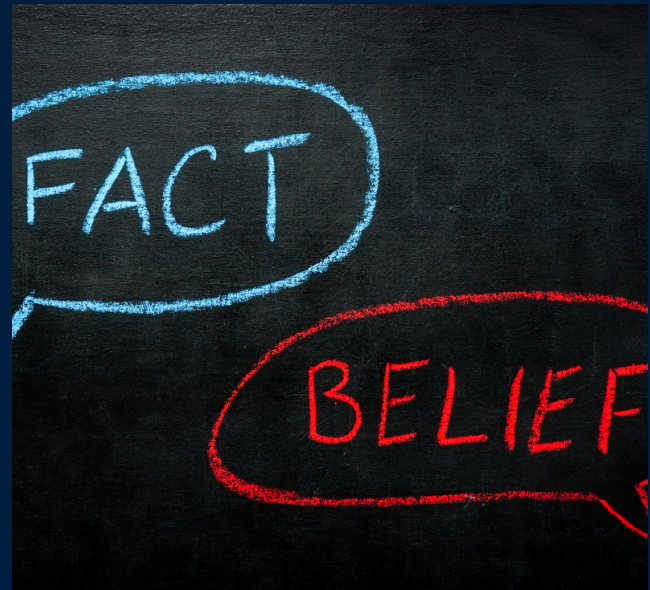
Bias and the Tail

5. BIAS IS POLITICAL AS WELL AS COGNITIVE

"Cognitive bias is half the story; political bias the other half."

Bent Flyvbjerg, Top Ten Behavioral Biases in Project Management, Project Management Journal (2021).

Pro Tip: build independent assurance into early gateways so optimistic estimates made to win funding get challenged before approval.



6. IT COST RISK LIVES IN THE TAIL

"Managers may be unwittingly exposing their organizations to extreme risk by severely underestimating the probability of large cost overruns."

Flyvbjerg, Budzier, Lee, Keil, Lunn and Bester, The Empirical Reality of IT Project Cost Overruns, Journal of Management Information Systems (2022), from 5,392 IT projects.

Pro Tip: size contingency for the tail, not your company average, and set clear 'Stop' and/or re-baseline triggers.



Missing Benefits



7. ON TIME AND ON BUDGET IS NOT SUCCESS

"Even so-called successful projects fail to deliver the hoped for business benefits about 72% of the time."

DiBello, Raisinghani and Wang, The Development of Expertise in Project Management, Decision Sciences Institute (NSF-funded research with PMI members).

Pro Tip: report benefits at every board, and name a benefits owner who stays accountable after handover.

8. VALUE SLIPS WHEN PLANS CHANGE

"Entities do not specifically consider the impact of major changes to cost, time and scope on expected project benefits and economic viability."

Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024 (2025).

Of 110 major projects worth \$145.5 billion, 48.2% showed cost increases. The UK National Audit Office (2024) reports a similar gap.

Pro Tip: fund post-implementation benefit reviews before closure, and invest in a benefits library and librarian to maintain benefits data into the future.

People & Priorities

Ahead of method

9. METHOD IS NOT THE LEVER

"Project teams perform equally well using predictive, hybrid and agile project management approaches."

Project Management Institute, Pulse of the Profession 2024

Survey of 2,246 project professionals and 342 project leaders; average performance rate 73.8%.

Pro Tip: choose the approach that fits the work, consider iterative and incremental delivery with clear OKRs, then invest in people and governance.

10. PEOPLE SKILLS & PRIORITISATION PROTECT INVESTMENT

"Prioritizing power skills pays off."

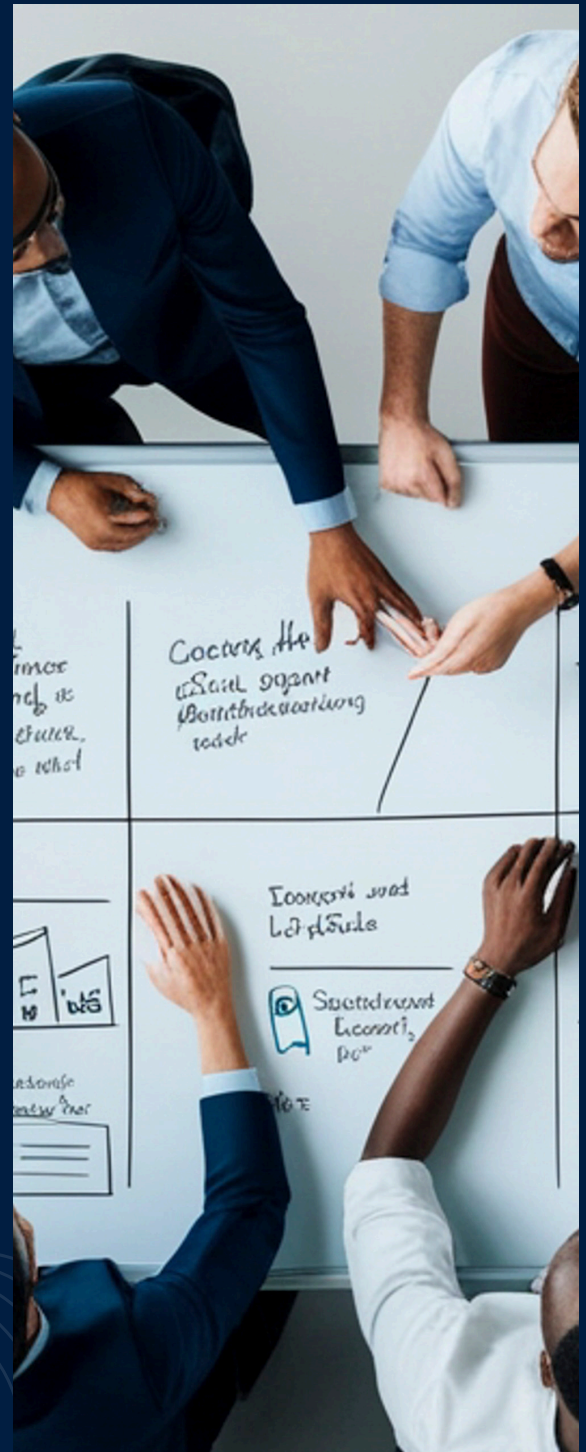
PMI, Pulse of the Profession 2023

"When organizations execute too many strategic projects without clear prioritization from the top...most projects will fail to meet their initial cost, time and benefit estimates."

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, PM World Journal (2020).

In organisations with a high-priority on power skills, wasted investment averaged 4.8% versus 8.8% in organisations weighting power skills as low priority.

Pro Tip: invest in leadership education and mentoring, and give your portfolio board a clear mandate to stop or defer work that isn't producing value.



ADMF

The Achieve Delivery Maturity Framework (ADMF) turns this evidence into four dimensions and thirteen principles. **Clarity** is the information the organisation runs on. **Strategy** is how leaders set direction and make the hard calls. **People** is who delivers and how they work together. **Execution** is how the work is structured and delivered.



The thirteen principles: Truth Before Comfort, Decision Architecture, Fast Feedback, Sponsorship Is a Verb, Solve the Limiting Factor, Ruthless Prioritisation, Capability by Design, Bring Clever People Together, Respect Trumps Harmony, Pressure Builds Diamonds, Consistency Beats Perfection, No Dumb Requirements and Safe Sizing.

Each is assessed on a 6-point maturity scale, from reactive to self-improving.

The Numbers at a Glance

Every figure checked against its primary source

Theme	Figure	What it measures	Source
Full success	0.5%	Projects on budget, on time and on benefits	Flyvbjerg and Gardner 2023
Project size	61% vs 6%	Success of small versus grand software projects	Standish CHAOS 2015
Sponsorship	No. 1	Skilled executive sponsor ranks first of ten Factors of Success	Standish CHAOS 2015
Estimating	39%	Average cost overrun across 1,603 capital investment projects	Flyvbjerg 2021
Method	73.8%	Average project performance, whatever the approach	PMI Pulse 2024
Power skills	4.8% vs 8.8%	Wasted investment, high versus low priority on power skills	PMI Pulse 2023
Cost growth	48.2%	Victorian major projects with cost increases (53 of 110)	VAGO 2025

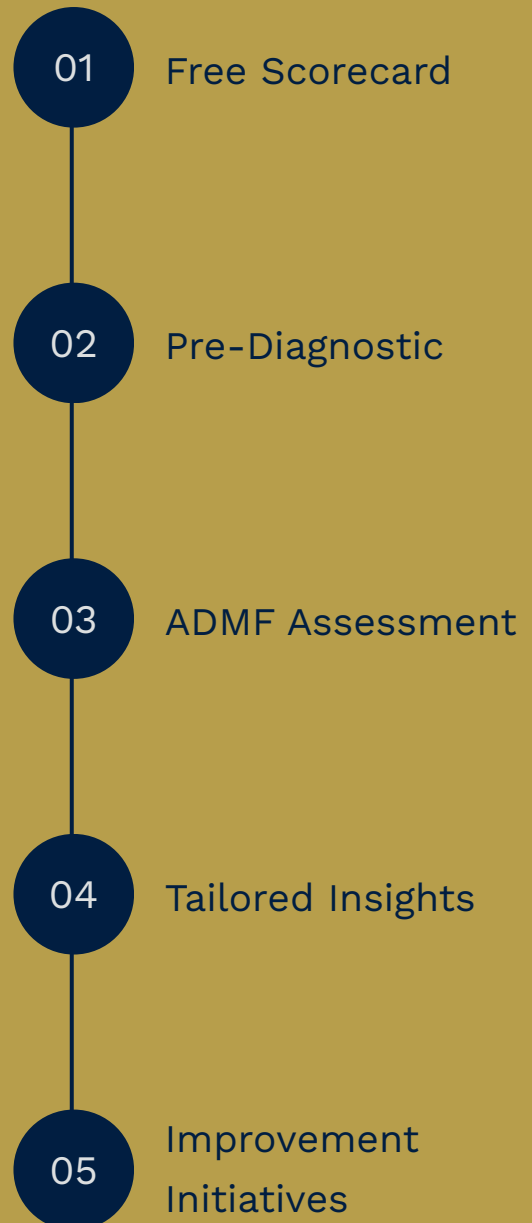
Work With Us

From Evidence to Capability

Achieve P3M is a Melbourne-based consultancy that turns evidence like this into better delivery.

Founded by Daniela Kellett (FIPMA ANZ, ChPP, CPPD), we help PMOs and delivery leaders assess project, programme and portfolio capability, design processes, procedures and templates, build training, and coach project professionals.

Our five-step pathway starts with a free scorecard, so you can see where you stand before you commit to anything more.



Ready to Elevate your Delivery Maturity?



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