

Why projects fail long before construction begins

IDPM Executive Brief No. 04

Projects rarely fail because construction begins badly.

They fail because planning begins without sufficient preparation.

Many organisations focus on selecting designers, approving layouts or defining budgets while overlooking one fundamental question:

Is the project actually ready to start?

Without clear objectives, defined governance, realistic budgets and agreed success criteria, even the best project team cannot deliver predictable results.

Successful projects invest time before design starts.

That preparation consistently saves far more time during delivery.

The Planning Phase Determines Success

The earliest project decisions have the greatest influence on:

- programme
- budget
- quality
- business continuity
- user satisfaction

Mistakes made during planning become increasingly expensive to correct later.

Typical Signs of Poor Preparation

Projects often start before:

- objectives are aligned
- governance is defined
- stakeholders are identified
- risks are assessed
- budgets are validated
- decision makers are confirmed

These gaps inevitably create uncertainty throughout delivery.

What Project Readiness Means

A project is ready when:

- objectives are measurable
- governance is agreed
- responsibilities are clear
- budget assumptions are realistic
- stakeholders are engaged
- risks are understood

Only then should design begin.

Executive Checklist

- ☐ Are project objectives documented?
- ☐ Is governance established?
- ☐ Have key stakeholders been identified?
- ☐ Is the budget realistic?
- ☐ Are project risks understood?
- ☐ Is everyone working towards the same objectives?

Independent
Project
Management

Conclusion

Preparation is rarely visible.

Its absence always is.

Projects succeed because they begin well—not because they recover later.