Why Good Initiatives Stall and How to Keep Projects Moving

Service area:
Project & Program Management



A small services firm decided to move its client onboarding to a new process. Everyone agreed it was a good idea. Three months later, the old spreadsheet was still in use, two team members had built their own versions, and the owner was asking for status updates in the hallway.

Nothing was wrong with the idea. What was missing was structure: a clear owner, a sequence of work, visible deadlines, and a simple way to report progress. That is what project management provides and it matters just as much in a ten-person business as in a large company.

Illustrative example: the scenario described is fictional.

Key takeaway: Good initiatives need ownership, sequence, deadlines, and visible progress.

Why good initiatives stall

Most internal projects do not fail in one dramatic moment. They drift. The work competes with daily client demands, decisions wait for the owner, and no one is sure what 'done' looks like.



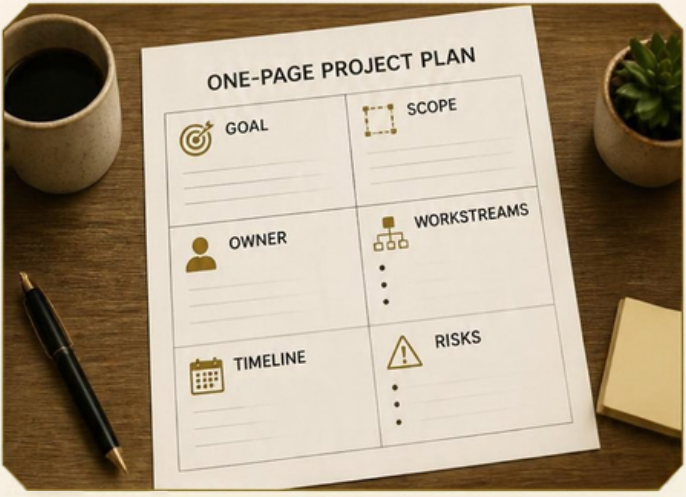
- **No single owner:** everyone is involved, so no one is accountable.
- **Undefined scope:** the project keeps growing as new ideas are added.
- **Invisible dependencies:** one task waits on another that nobody is tracking.
- **Status by memory:** progress is reported informally, if at all.

Key takeaway: Projects stall when ownership, scope, dependencies, and status are invisible.

Start with a one-page project plan

You do not need complex software to bring structure to a project. A one-page plan answers six questions:

- **Goal:** what will be different when this is complete?
- **Scope:** what is included—and, just as important, what is not?
- **Owner:** who is accountable for the outcome?
- **Workstreams:** what are the two to four major areas of work?
- **Timeline:** what are the key milestones and target dates?
- **Risks:** what could slow this down, and what is the plan if it does?



Key takeaway: A simple one-page plan makes the project answerable before the work begins.

Coordinate the people involved

Projects touch people who are not on the core team: staff who will use the new process, managers who must approve changes, and sometimes clients or vendors.



List these stakeholders early and decide what each needs to know and when.



A short note before a change lands prevents most of the resistance that shows up afterward.

Key takeaway: Coordinate stakeholders early so people know what is changing, when, and why.

Track risks before they become problems

A risk register sounds formal, but it can be a short table: the risk, how likely it is, its impact, the owner, and the response.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Owner	Response



Review it at each check-in. The purpose is not to predict everything; it is to make sure known concerns have a name next to them.

Key takeaway: **Give every known concern an owner and a response before it becomes a problem.**

Report progress simply and regularly

A brief status update what was completed, what is next, what is at risk, and what decisions are needed keeps leaders informed without extra meetings.

✓	Completed
→	Next
⚠	At risk
?	Decisions needed

Use the same format every time. Consistency makes it easy to spot when something is slipping.



Key takeaway: A consistent four-part status update keeps progress visible and decisions moving.

Quick exercise and next step

Quick exercise

Pick one internal initiative that has been 'in progress' for more than a month. In 20 minutes, write its goal, owner, next three milestones, and its biggest risk. If any of those are hard to answer, risk you have found the reason it has stalled.

If you would like a second set of eyes on this work, contact AuofOnyx to talk through where your business is today and what would help most.

Goal	
Owner	
Next milestone date	

Next step

Choose one stalled initiative this week and give it an owner, a scope statement, and a next milestone date.



Key takeaway: Give one stalled initiative an owner, a clear scope, and a next milestone date.

Source: Paula Kay Martin and Karen Tate. “What’s in a project plan?” PM Network, Project Management Institute, 2000.
Read PMI’s project-plan guidance: https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/project-plan-assembly-elements-summary-3128

Source: Atlassian. “Project Status Report: Tips and Templates for Success.”
Read the project status-report guide: https://www.atlassian.com/agile/project-management/status-report