Project Types – Risks Matrix for Successful SharePoint Projects

There are a variety of project types that leverage SharePoint. There are also a variety of risks that each SharePoint Project faces. This matrix shows the potential impact of each risk on each project type.

Type of Risk	Type of Installation							
	Internet	Extranet	Intranet	Doc Management	Project Management	Collaboration	Mini-App	App
Bad Expectations	●	●	●[1]	●[2]	●	●[3]	●[4]	◉[5]
Poor Terms Definition	◉	●	●	●	◉	●	◉[6]	◉
Poor Understanding	●[7]	●[8]	●	●[9]	◉	●	◉	◉
No Compelling Reason	○	◉[10]	●	◉	◉	◉	○	○
No Value Proposition	○	◉[11]	●[12]	◉	◉	○[13]	◉	◉
Tools Syndrome	◉	●	●	●	◉	●	◉	◉
No Launch	●	●	●	◉[14]	◉	◉	○	○
Poor Adoption		◉	●[15]	◉	●[16]	◉	◉	◉
Politics	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Culture	◉	◉	●	●	●	●	●	●

Key:

○ = No or limited potential impact
◉ = Some potential impact
● = Substantial potential impact

The types of installation (columns) are designed to summarize most of the types of installations that utilize SharePoint. They are summarized here:

- **Internet** – A general Internet site which is characterized by anonymous access and a broad set of users. Most Internet sites are largely marketing sites. SharePoint implementations tend to provide support as well as marketing. SharePoint can be configured to work in an Internet environment but it's not its primary design goal. Measuring the success of an Internet site is difficult so it is rarely done. This makes it hard to gauge the effectiveness of a SharePoint Internet solution.
- **Extranet** – Often called a partner Extranet, they differ from Internet sites in that they generally have authenticated connections – only customers are partners who are authorized can use the site. Extranet configurations generally require a few customers to be successful because of the 80/20 rule (80% of business comes from 20% of the customers). Extranet configurations require special care for security.
- **Intranet** – A frequently deployed scenario, Intranets are the most difficult implementations to get right because of the numerous risks and because of the need to get many more people involved to make the project successful. The end notes address specific implications of risks to the Intranet project type.
- **Document Management** – Document Management installations require smaller groups of people to become involved for the project to be successful. Most installations require that the authors of the documents be involved, however, the consumers of the documents need only have a way to get to the documents. Document management implementations have generally have some of the lowest levels of risks of any type of SharePoint project.
- **Project Management** – Project Management installations are designed to support the project management process. Because project management is generally well defined, the SharePoint usage tends to be more focused and therefore more successful. They are not, however, completely immune to the maladies that impact other SharePoint projects.
- **Collaboration** – Collaboration itself is poorly defined so SharePoint implementations with Collaboration as a goal suffer from many issues such as poorly defined terms and misunderstandings. On the positive side, they generally require fewer people involved to be successful. A small group of people (5 or so) can be effective at using SharePoint as a collaborative tool very easily.
- **Mini-Application** – Mini-application implementations focus on creating a solution utilizing the SharePoint platform as their base. Mini-Applications tend to have a small amount of development and/or extensive customization. One of the challenges with creating mini-applications on SharePoint is that the expectation begins to shift from allowing for small inefficiencies or small mismatches with the users process to a low tolerance for adapting the process.
- **Application** – These implementations utilize SharePoint as a platform for solving a problem. This is similar to how .NET applications build upon the .NET framework. Application implementations require moderate to high levels of development to create fully integrated solutions.

In the other dimension (rows) of the grid contain various categories of risks. There are many organizational risks for a SharePoint project. The list included in the grid, and further described below, is designed to group risks into categories which can be planned for. Here are the risk categories:

- **Bad Expectations** – Bad expectations are about believing: that the product does too much, that it scales to volumes that it doesn't support, or that it works one way when it really works another. Most bad expectations are the result of a silver-bullet mentality which expects that the product is a silver-bullet to the problems that the organization is facing. The quickest fix to bad expectations is to test every assumption. Although seemingly time consuming testing assumptions has long term benefits.
- **Poor Terms Definition** – Learning the lingo (jargon) for SharePoint is difficult. Because most people don't focus on understanding the terms that occur in SharePoint conversations the understanding is often fuzzy at best. Consider that *collaboration* doesn't mean "to conspire with the enemy", but what does it mean? Nail down your terms definition in a glossary or in some document that everyone can agree on.
- **Poor Understanding** – Poor understanding leads to bad assumptions, as mentioned in bad expectations. For instance, poor understanding may lead someone to need alerts but turn off searching since they don't need searching without realizing that Search is required for alerts to function. Poor understanding of customization options leads people to believe some items are not changeable – which are actually changeable. This leads to more complex solutions than are necessary. Poor understanding is one of the more substantial risks to a SharePoint project.
- **No Compelling Reason** -- Many projects are started much like companies before the dot com debacle. The companies would expect their revenue to come in from a dozen or so streams. Many SharePoint projects that support will come from a dozen or more small and undefined pockets. In reality this is rarely effective. More frequently what happens is that no one finds enough compelling reasons to keep using the site. In the long term the site isn't successful because there's no one with a compelling reason to use it.
- **No Value Proposition** -- The value proposition, or return on investment, is the usefulness of the site. and whether that is sufficient to get them to come back. This also applies from a corporate perspective. The value proposition for the company must be such that they continue to maintain the site.
- **Tools Syndrome** -- Tools syndrome is where organizations continue to buy product after product hoping that each one will be the silver bullet necessary to solve every problem. Each product is rapidly abandoned for the next product. This is particularly

risky because SharePoint is a difficult product to get right. Organizations with a tool syndrome will quickly abandon it when the work gets to be too much.

- **No Launch** -- Ben Franklin may have said "build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door." Those were different times. Today people must have some way to know that your "better mouse trap" exists. That means some sort of a launch where people are told about the site and its benefits (not features). Grass Roots movements are impossible to predict and foolish to count on.
- **Poor Adoption** -- Poor adoption is really a symptom of other issues more than it is a risk itself. However, it is listed here because it's possible to inherit a project with poor adoption that must be fixed. It is also possible that previous implementations of a given implementation have been tried before and failed, so people are disinclined to give sharepoint a fair shot.
- **Politics** -- Politics are an unfortunate reality at every organization. Power hungry fights erupt between managers and workers. Ultimately this divisiveness shakes the project to it's core threatening all but the most firmly grounded projects.
- **Culture** -- Culture is the close cousin to politics. Where politics are focused on divisiveness, culture is focused on unity – but unity around the status quo. SharePoint represents change and because of this it is the enemy. If the developers are used to developing applications in traditional ways they will want to continue.

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[1] **Intranet/Bad Expectations** -- Bad expectations for the Intranet run the gamut, however, they seem to focus around flexibility that SharePoint "should" have but does not. Care should be taken when working on projects that assumptions are not made about what SharePoint can and can not do.

[2] **Document Management/Bad Expectations** -- The biggest challenges with expectations on document management focused solutions is that SharePoint will work like a large scale document management system with separate indexing or that that SharePoint will enforce a fixed process regarding check in/check out.

[3] **Collaboration/Bad Expectations** -- The primary bad expectation here is that SharePoint will **cause** collaboration. SharePoint **facilitates** collaboration. It will not cause an organization to start collaborating if the culture doesn't support it.

[4] **Mini-App/Bad Expectations** -- The primary issue with expectations and mini-applications is that features will be expected out of SharePoint which don't work the way expected and the resulting application will have less functionality than needed.

[5] **App/Bad Expectations** -- Because applications have larger budgets, coding resources, and time, they can more easily recover from bad expectations. This doesn't mean that the same pressures don't exist just that the size and scale make the issue less critical.

[6] **Mini-App/Poor Terms Definition** -- The requirements (investigation) process that happens as a part of these projects will sometimes clarify project level definitions for terms. That help to reduce the potential impact of the issue.

[7] **Internet/Poor Understanding** -- The greatest issues related to poor understanding and the Internet is how SharePoint processes requests and how it will fit into the environment. While SharePoint is capable of being used in Internet applications, it's not designed for this purpose. It will exhibit limitations when used in the anonymous authentication environment of the Internet.

[8] **Extranet/Poor Understanding** -- Extranet implementations suffer from the same need to understand how SharePoint processes requests but brings additional complexity in terms of correctly implementing instant messaging in a cross-organizational configuration. This is particularly important because SharePoint utilizes a client-based model for seeing availability and status.

[9] **Document management/Poor Understanding** -- SharePoint approaches document management very differently than traditional document management systems which have separate index fields that must be keyed in. SharePoint also does not enforce a hard rule about checking out documents as most other document management systems do. SharePoint doesn't do document management like other systems do document management.. Failing to realize this can be the death knell for a document management based SharePoint solution.

[10] **Extranet/No Compelling Reason** -- Extranets often use as their selling point the idea of "self service." This is an appealing idea for the business offering the service, however, it may or may not be appealing to the customer. It's important to ensure that your users wants to service themselves. Ask yourself the question, "What value will self-service bring the customers?"

[11] **Extranet/No Value Proposition** -- It's possible to not offer a value proposition to your customers. It's less likely that this will occur since they were likely intimately involved in telling you what value they wanted.

[12] **Intranet/No Value Proposition** -- Intranets can wither if there's not enough incentive for people to add new content – and for people to use the Intranet to find information rather than asking other people.

[13] **Collaboration/No Value Proposition** -- There's a potential impact of no value proposition on collaborative implementations. However, collaborative projects tend to focus around things with inherent value. Because things are so valuable that a group of people has been dedicated to producing the artifacts, it's unlikely that there will be no value proposition.

[14] **Document Management/No Launch** -- Because document management systems largely need the authors of the documents to know where to put them immediately and a way for users to find the documents later it's not essential that there's a launch to a broad audience. As long as the authors know where to put content and the readers can find a link to there, your document management initiatives will likely be successful.

[15] **Intranet/Poor Adoption** -- For Intranet projects adoption is key. Helping everyone in the organization feel positive about the Intranet, and understanding that it offers true value to the organization is critical to the long term success of the project.

[16] **Project Management/Poor Adoptions** -- For project management to work, everyone must participate. While project management implementations of SharePoint are not more susceptible than other types of implementations, it is critical that adoption be complete. If everyone doesn't participate the SharePoint-based project management site will suffer.