What do you believe are the three most common reasons for project failure?

Af first glance, it would seem unlikely that a quote from a 19th century literary classic could shine an insight on the reasons for software development failures, but the opening lines of Anna Karenina (Tolstoy, 1995:1):

> "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

were repurposed by Jared Diamond in his 1997 book "Guns, Germs and Steel" to form the basis for his ***Anna Karenina Principle***, which states that the reasons behind the success of a civilization are analogous, if not identical, whereas the causes for a civilization's failure are myriad and disparate.

This principle could equally be applied to software development projects. Projects can fail in a multitude of different ways, with seemingly unconnected causes and reasons. There are, however, causes that are repeatedly linked to software project failures. Cerpa & Verner's (2009) identified and counted the reasons and causes of over 50 failed software projects and reported that the three most common reasons for failure were:

> "1. delivery date impacted the development process,
> 2. project was underestimated,
> 3. risks were not re-assessed, controlled, or managed through the project"

A quick categorization of these reasons would suggest that they all fall under the remit of project management leadership, rather than the quality of its development, testing, or the motivation or skills of individuals involved in the project. Indeed, I would argue that inadequate or poor project leadership is more likely to lead to insurmountable deficiencies in a software project than many of the other possible causes.

In the lecturecast, the infamous 1960s failed IBM system 360 system was blamed on poor estimation and analysis, a reason still considered to be amongst the most important contributors to IT project failures in PriceWaterhouseCooper's 2012 survey (PwC, 2012). It could be argued that poor estimation could lead to other failures as the team cuts corners to meet unrealistic targets and gets demotivated when they are not met.

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