

Can business IT projects succeed?

FOR EVERY ENTERPRISE IT PROJECT, THERE ARE AS MANY VERSIONS OF REALITY AS THERE ARE STAKEHOLDERS. IS THERE A WAY TO DEFEAT THE ODDS AND WIN?

In aviation, there is a saying: 'There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but very few old, bold pilots.'

In the enterprise, we could translate this to: 'There are successful business projects and there are successful IT projects, but there are very few successful business IT projects.'

Managing perceptions about what, when, where and how IT technologies should help the business is no trivial task for those involved. It requires clarity on the exact business problem being solved, as well as IT's scope. Broad consensus and stress testing assumptions on the basis of evidence, wherever possible, are crucial.

While there are a plethora of project governance approaches and frameworks such as PRINCE2 and PMBOK to rely on, their relevance in complex, fast moving and volatile business environments is questionable. If, on the other hand, you are implementing IT systems along the lines of a Soviet era industrial complex, these frameworks may be appropriate.

Adopting 'Agile' methodology for enterprise IT project management isn't straightforward either. Delivering stellar projects under this moniker requires a cross-functional structure and collaborative culture, supported by a well-defined Agile framework. If your organisation is at war with itself and/or the IT department (or your IT vendor), the probability of a successful 'Agile' project is remote. You're likely to get better odds by putting your money on race number five at the Royal Randwick.

But there are a few influential factors that are game-changers when it comes to

enterprise IT projects delivering realisable (not perceived) and sustained value.

CONDITIONED RESPONSES

Humans are, for the most part, driven by incentives, and financial incentives, for the most part, rank highly in the eyes of business managers. In his famous canine experiment, Pavlov showed conditioned responses are easily elicited when subjects are presented with an incentive.

If your IT project is important for your organisation, incentive schemes for relevant line-of-business executives should be adjusted to reflect their share of accountability. With no 'skin in the game', business stakeholders are less inclined to get behind the project.

When it comes to implementing and maintaining major new IT initiatives, incentive schemes for those outside IT should be adjusted to reflect their share of accountability in ensuring project outcomes deliver their promised value.

KEEP HIPPOS UNDER CONTROL

The unintentional distraction wrought by an out-of-control HIPPO (Highest Paid Person's Opinion), can wreak havoc on an IT project. The most prominent people are targets for stakeholders attempting to influence their decisions in

a way that might be in that stakeholder's short-term interest, but not those of the organisation. Your IT project governance processes should embody rigour, not rigor-mortis.

COST VERSUS REALISED VALUE

Expecting an underfunded, poorly structured IT team with the wrong mix of skills to drive real value is an assumption that needs to be tested. Equip your IT team adequately or select IT vendors to partner with.

Companies that still adhere to the outmoded model of IT as a 'service' function to the business, and therefore subservient to its demands, potentially miss the golden opportunity of having IT precipitate, drive and support innovation and transformation. Shifting this attitude is critical for technology to deliver the optimal outcomes needed.

An effective, trusted and engaged IT function is a key element in ensuring your organisation thrives and survives in our technology dependent, competitive, volatile environment. **CIO**

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