Ensuring Successful Project Delivery

This article is part of an Expert Opinion series examining how to ensure IT-based projects are delivered on time, within budget, and according to specification

Leadership Roles and Management Roles

What are they, how do they differ, and what part do they each play in the delivery of successful IT-based projects?

By Glenda Wheeler. Director, Tharollo Consulting

This article first appeared on IT-Web, 5 September 2014

Orchestrating project success means delivering the 'Vital Five' (VF). All successful projects fulfil the objectives of their vision, motivation, action, timeline, and budget. On completion, successful projects contribute to building the company of tomorrow, reinforcing its competitive advantage in an ongoing cycle of positive evolution.

Such projects aim to fulfil the Vital Five in equal measure. Driven by commercial and technical pragmatism, there may well have to be agreed trade-offs between each element of the VF. But these adjustments need to be influenced by a commitment to maintain each element's essential integrity. There needs to be a 'VF-balance' so that one element is not fatally compromised to benefit its partners. Result? The project comes in on time, within its budget and meets its functional specification.

In terms of maintaining this pragmatic balancing act, a key difference between leadership and management is that leadership has responsibilities that span all of the Vital Five. Management does not. Management responsibilities lie within action, timeline, and budget – the elements that serve to realise the vision and its motivation.

Functions such as budgeting, structuring and allocating tasks, setting deadlines and targets, and measuring and reporting performance, are typically governed by management processes. The concept of management and its importance in enabling the company to operate in an effective and efficient manner is well-established and universally acknowledged.

Within a project, the provision of effective and efficient activities is therefore a management responsibility. The idea of management-influence being apparent in all operational aspects of a project is consequently readily understood and accepted.

However, the idea of leadership-influence extending throughout a project is not so widely expected or experienced. All too often there is insufficient leadership within action, timeline and budget. Consequently, the required functionality is frequently not achieved, deadlines are missed and costs escalate. Projects begin to spiral towards failure.

So, what is leadership and how should it contribute to successful projects?

If leadership roles are linked to each of the Vital Five, it becomes easier to answer that question with tangible examples of leadership as an operational function within a project. Highlighting the links also creates a clear – and critically important – distinction between the functions of leadership and management.

Visualising tomorrow

Unless the vision and motivation are understood – where the company is going and the reasons why – there's little that can be done to determine what actions to take, when they are needed and at what cost.

It is a leadership role to develop the vision of a changed organisation and the reasons why change is necessary. Leaders must then champion the change to ensure it's understood and embraced by the all the stakeholders it will affect.

This function can be rigorously underpinned by the support of senior business analysts (BAs) who are skilled at translating business requirements in a way that secures a positive, applicable understanding from those who must meet the requirements.

To create and motivate the vision that initiates projects to build the company of tomorrow, leadership needs to possess an accurate awareness of the opportunities and risks emerging within their environment. Once again, leaders can be actively supported by BAs who are accustomed to identifying business challenges and proposing appropriate technology-based solutions.

Leaders need to see risks and opportunities as they emerge, decide on a response, and make sure it's timeous. It's a bit like driving a car. Drivers must look at the road ahead, the running children, the cyclist, the slowing bus, the upcoming robot, cars approaching the side roads, that big truck in the opposite lane, the tyre-ripping pothole.

Given enough training and practice, most people can master the essential skills required to drive safely on public roads. Everyone is a leader when they drive their car. Success as a driver depends on the driver's ability to control the vehicle, anticipate events before they occur, assess what will happen next, and respond to the road ahead as quickly and as appropriately as necessary. It's also the driver's responsibility – not as effective leaders but as effective managers – to ensure the vehicles are roadworthy, adequately fuelled and suited for the routes intended for travelling and the loads that will be carried.

As a bit of an aside, this would strongly suggest that, just like management, leadership is a skill that can be developed and honed with the right training and sufficient practice.

Becoming tomorrow

Having established a project's vision and its motivation, the leadership function must identify and empower the relevant action. This requires continuous effort to encourage, secure and maintain commitment to the vision and motivation among all those responsible for action.

> **"It is a leadership role to develop the vision of a changed organisation and the reasons why change is necessary."**

Leadership must also demonstrate visible, tangible commitment to enabling action by removing obstacles to success and displaying a commitment to providing the necessary resources. And leadership can be actively supported in this role, through requirements engineering by BAs with the ability to accurately interpret and communicate the necessary actions to realise the vision and its underlying motivation.

As part of this action-enabling role, leadership must establish a deep respect for timeline and budget by highlighting the significance of meeting targets and the dangers of allowing them to slip. People need to understand – and accept – why their work is governed by deadlines and fixed costs. BA skills in requirements assurance need to be deployed to ensure adherence to timelines and budgets.

To encourage and sustain momentum within the project, leadership should set objectives incrementally to secure rapid results. This is yet another area where BAs can provide guidance through requirements engineering. These quick wins fuel a sense of achievement and purpose within the project. They strengthen levels of job satisfaction and the desire to succeed.

This 'motivated morale' is then further reinforced through leadership that broadcasts the significance of these achievements and openly acknowledges the contribution of all who delivered them. Leadership therefore cultivates an environment of pride, capability, self-esteem and a culture of success.

Expert Opinion from Tharollo Consulting: Project Management & Business Analysis

The Foundation for a Successful Project is Firm Leadership
Successful IT-based projects - those that are delivered on time, on budget, and on spec - share some essential characteristics

Solving Project Delivery Challenges
Enriching the Skills of Business Analysts and Project Managers

Bridging the Divide: Solving the Disconnect between IT and Business
The Business Analyst must cultivate communication between IT and Business

Agile: a Response to the Challenges of Delivering Successful Software Solutions
Why Agile is a philosophy and not a methodology

IT Tail Wags the Business Dog
What are the dangers of being solution-driven versus requirements-driven

Where do Business Analysts Belong
In project management, what skills do analysts need and how must they contribute to assuring project success?

Glenda Wheeler is a founding director of Tharollo Consulting. Her profound understanding of the real factors that cause repetitive failures in IT-based projects is complemented by a proven approach to ensuring project success.

Established in 1997, Tharollo's expertise lies in managing R40m - R300m initiatives and is backed by a track-record of 100% success in delivering projects on time, within budget, and according to specification.

Tharollo is a North Sotho word meaning, 'solution for a problem.'

Tharollo Consulting (Pty) Ltd   Glenda Wheeler   082 772 1581   glenda.wheeler@tharollo.com   www.tharollo.com