In the media

Solving the project delivery crisis

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This article first appeared on IT-Web, 29 November 2013

Across South Africa organisations face a serious IT skills problem. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Information Technology Report 2013, SA is ranked 102 out of 144 economies for IT skills.

The problem is particularly acute when it comes to delivering IT projects on time and within budget. Despite their best efforts, inexperienced and poorly-supported Business Analysts and Project Managers battle to prevent the damage caused to business by repeated project failures.

Never moving forward. Always fighting fires?

To capitalise on strategic initiatives that produce real competitive advantage, organisations must first ensure the successful delivery of their Business-as-Usual (BAU) projects. Far too often investment in strategic projects is hamstrung by the continual need to commit excessive resources to the BAU environment. Constant fire-fighting undermines the ability to change and prosper.

At the BAU level, organisations need to accelerate their on-going project delivery capability to achieve fundamental commercial objectives such as containing or reducing costs and complying with regulatory changes.

Ensuring a solid BAU foundation is critical if an organisation wants to strengthen its competitive advantage by implementing projects that serve higher, strategic initiatives. It is therefore crucial that all BAU functions operate in the most efficient and effective manner.

Building strong foundations for IT project success

The first step towards reinforcing - and then maintaining - the capabilities to deliver successful BAU projects is to define the requisite skills-set and experience levels. Failure to do so prevents an organisation from employing suitable Business Analysts and Project Managers.

By establishing specific Project Skills Criteria, an organisation's investment in the project delivery team will be targeted, appropriate and cost effective. A key benefit of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its Business Analysts and Project Managers is that the organisation can introduce professional mentoring programmes to both enrich and entrench the right skills during project execution.

Once a correctly skilled delivery team is established, it's essential to ensure it operates optimally within the organisation's way-of-work. By applying a structured methodology to enabling the team, the organisation is positioned to ensure that effective BAU projects are efficiently delivered.
Critically, this methodology allows a more productive balance in the allocation of investments to both BAU and strategic projects. In short, more resources can be assigned to initiatives that drive the organisation forward - rather than simply standing still - and reinforce its competitive advantage.

Why IT projects fail: the business factors

Why are projects so frequently doomed to fail from the start? Local and international research shows a commonality in the factors that cause IT projects to fail. For example, academic analysis such as the [Prosperus Report](#) by the RAU Standard Bank Academy for Information Technology highlights why South African projects either succeed or fail.

The 'failure-factor' list is usually topped by inadequate user involvement throughout the project. This leads to a poor appreciation of the project's Business Requirements, resulting in a flawed definition of objectives.

Business Analysts and Project Managers often misunderstand the direction given by the executive. Poor communication breeds poor comprehension. Typically, project teams do not accurately interpret the business goals and objectives, generating an incorrect description of project-scope and the consequent misdirection of the entire project.
What hope then of the executive's expected return on investment in terms of results, time and cost?

Why IT projects fail: the project factors

The failure to accurately define, document, agree and approve a project's Business Requirements is exacerbated by insufficient specialist knowledge and operational skills amongst the entire delivery team. Far too frequently, Business Analysts and Project Managers lack the pragmatic, hands-on experience of managing and completing successful projects.

Projects are therefore trapped within a vicious circle of repetitive mistakes that consistently prevent success: they are *designed* to fail.

Aside from the barriers to success caused by a lack of skills and knowledge, Project Managers are often unable to manage risk and change. This further dilutes the likelihood of a project's success: risk management and change control processes are not sufficiently robust and team members are often reluctant to accept and embrace the imperative of change.

Moving forward: avoiding project failure

Enterprises that have the highest chance of achieving consistent project success actively invest in enriching and retaining the skills of their Business Analysts and Project Managers. This investment must produce higher project throughput, faster response to the demands of competition and eliminate the recurring costs of unnecessary rework.

It must also raise the credibility of the team across all the business communities it serves and build levels of performance that consistently delight stakeholders.

Methodology is a key component in the routine delivery of successful projects. Although Project Management methodologies are well defined, proven methodologies are not readily available to Business Analysts. Rather, these are in the domain of established professional consultants with extensive experience of delivering projects on time and within budget.

Without question, organisations certainly can forge skilled and productive delivery teams by engaging consistently successful project-delivery specialists. With professional mentors working alongside your delivery teams, knowledge is transferred and embedded to create motivated, loyal and capable individuals who are inspired and empowered to succeed. Time and time again.

Glenda Wheeler is a founding director of Tharollo Consulting. Her profound understanding of the real factors that cause project failure 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 and within budget.

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

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