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Successful Project Delivery Insights

Solving Project Delivery Challenges

Enriching the Skills of Business Analysts and Project Managers

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Introduction

Across South Africa, organisations are faced with a serious IT skills problem. In particular, despite their best efforts, inexperienced and poorly-supported Business Analysts and Project Managers are unable to prevent the repeated damage caused by project failures.

These failures undermine an organisation's critical ability to create and sustain competitive advantage through the successful delivery and maintenance of strategic initiatives that produce real competitive advantage.

All too often, investment in such projects is constrained by the constant need to commit excessive resources to the Business-as-Usual (BAU) environment. This fundamentally undermines an organisation's capacity to change and prosper.

An inconvenient truth: SA is ranked 102 out of 144 economies for IT skills. [1]

Many South African organisations recognise the need to accelerate the delivery of BAU projects in order to more rapidly capitalise on strategic opportunities. They also accept that the debilitating shortage of appropriately skilled Business Analysts and Project Managers is one of the primary reasons for recurring project failure.

It is also clear that organisations with the highest chance of achieving consistent project success are those which actively invest in enriching and retaining the skills of their Business Analysts and Project Managers.

Avoiding Project Failures

Organisations need to make prudent investments that will dramatically increase the performance of their project delivery teams. Such investments must produce higher project throughput, faster response to the demands of competition and eliminate the recurrent costs of constant rework. Creating motivated, loyal and capable individuals who are inspired to succeed is the most cost effective way of producing and retaining high-performance project delivery teams.

By leveraging highly competent and extensively experienced practitioners of project delivery disciplines, The Projects Accelerator Programme from Tharollo Consulting forges skilled, knowledgeable and productive delivery teams whose performance consistently delights stakeholders.

We institutionalise work practices in alignment with the organisation's way-of-work and enhance quality control practices within delivery teams. Backed by sixteen years of proven, 100% success in delivering projects on time and within budget, we transfer knowledge by working alongside delivery teams to fulfil the business objectives of an organisation's projects.

The Project Delivery Crisis

Why South African IT projects fail: the business factors

Projects are frequently doomed to fail from the start. Inadequate user involvement during the project's conception leads to a poor understanding of the Business Requirements. Obviously, this results in a flawed definition of the project's objectives.

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[1] World Economic Forum: Global Information Technology Report 2013. www.weforum.org

Our experience is consistent with local and international research findings that indicate a set of common factors that cause South African IT projects to fail.[2]

To make matters worse, Business Analysts and Project Managers often misunderstand the direction given by the executive. This poor communication typically means that project teams do not translate the business goals and objectives precisely, resulting in an incorrect definition of the project's scope and the consequent misdirection of the entire project.

Poor project management skills and inexperience then prevent realisation of the executive's expected ROI in time and at the anticipated cost.

Why South African IT projects fail: the project factors

The initial failure to accurately define, document, agree and approve a projects' Business Requirements across all stakeholders is exacerbated by a lack of practical operational skills amongst Project Managers and Business Analysts tasked with delivery.

This is due to a combination of insufficient specialist knowledge and a lack of pragmatic, hands-on experience in managing and completing successful projects.

Projects are 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 teams often fail to understand the capabilities and operation of the technologies being used or procured for the project. Consequently, technologies are not used to their fullest potential or are, to a greater or lesser extent, unfit for their intended purpose within the project.

The inability of Project Managers to manage risk and change influences both the business and project factors that dilute the likelihood of a project's success: risk management and change control processes are not sufficiently robust and delivery team members are often reluctant to accept and embrace the imperative of change.

Empowering BAs and PMs to solve the Project Delivery Crisis

Establishing and maintaining an operationally solid BAU foundation is essential if an organisation intends to concentrate on improving its competitive advantage by implementing projects that serve higher, strategic initiatives. It is therefore crucial that all the functions that comprise an organisation's BAU capabilities must operate in the most efficient and effective manner.

At the BAU level, organisations need to accelerate their on-going project delivery capability to consistently achieve fundamental commercial objectives. These objectives may include containing or reducing costs and complying with regulatory changes that affect an organisation's particular sector. At the same time, Continuous Improvement Projects need to be structured and managed so that they consistently deliver risk-mitigating, incremental enhancements to products, services and processes.

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[2] The Prosperus Report. IT Project Management Maturity versus Project Success in South Africa. www.uj.ac.za

Work upwards from the foundations:
ensuring efficiency and effectiveness within Business-as-Usual projects

The first step towards reinforcing and maintaining the delivery capabilities of an organisation's BAU projects is to accurately define the requisite skills-set and experience levels.

Failure to set appropriate Project Skills Criteria prevents an organisation from acquiring and assessing suitable Business Analysts and Project Managers.

Establishing specific Project Skills Criteria allows the organisation to ensure that its investment in the delivery team is targeted, appropriate and cost effective. A direct benefit of identifying strengths and weaknesses amongst its Business Analysts and Project Managers is that the organisation can introduce professional mentoring programmes to enrich and entrench these skills during project execution. This obviously includes leveraging in-house skills and talent.

Once a correctly skilled project delivery team has been established, it is essential to ensure that the team operates optimally within the organisation's way-of-work. By applying an appropriately structured approach to enabling the team, the organisation will be positioned to ensure that effective BAU projects are efficiently delivered.

This means that the organisation is able to achieve a more productive and appropriate balance in the allocation of its investments to both BAU and strategic projects. In short, resources can be assigned to the initiatives that drive the organisation forward and reinforce its competitive advantage.

100% proven ways to solve the Project Delivery Crisis

The Projects Accelerator (TPA) Programme

By creating and developing project delivery teams that are appropriately skilled and operationally cohesive, the organisation will raise the credibility of the team across all the business communities it serves. This builds confidence amongst all the project's stakeholders. It fosters a culture that encourages the communication that is, ultimately, at the heart of a project's success in terms of meeting accurately defined objectives.

To create productive, credible teams that meet their obligation to deliver successful BAU projects and therefore increase their ability to deliver strategic projects, an organisation should adopt a structured project framework, such as our SAPIEnT approach to skills enrichment and talent development.

SAPIEnT: governing for project success

Scope
Ensures a common understanding among all stakeholders of what the TPA engagement will accomplish.

It defines, agrees, documents, and approves the engagement's objectives according to the maturity of the organisation and individuals within the project delivery team.

Assess

Provides a low-cost understanding of why the delivery team will not meet its objectives and identifies remedial actions.

Evaluates the skills and experience of Business Analysts and Project Managers to perform according to the Project Skills Criteria and defines the composition of the project delivery team based on individual strengths and weaknesses.

Plan

Enables investment in the project delivery team to be targeted, appropriate and cost effective.

Configures the TPA programme to the specific needs of the organisation and to the skill levels of each individual within the delivery team.

Implement

Protects the investment made in the project delivery team and enriches the skills of individuals so they can apply best practices embodied by the TPA mentors.

Professional 'on-project' TPA mentoring by highly skilled and experienced practitioners in the project delivery environment identifies and develops increasingly skilled and talented Business Analysts and Project Managers. This contributes to increased retention of these skills within the organisation.

Evaluate

Prepares the organisation to deliver strategic projects that will be driven largely by in-house rather than external resources. It also highlights the type of external interventions that will most effectively leverage the enhanced skills and knowledge of in-house delivery teams.

A culture of continuous improvement in skills and knowledge across all delivery tasks is established by identifying measurable improvements in delivery performance.

Test

Identifies and measures the benefits realised during each, incremental phase of the TPA programme.

The Projects Accelerator Programme is proprietary to Tharollo Consulting.

Our profound understanding of the real factors that cause project failure is complemented by proven methods to safeguard project success. Using multi-disciplinary teams of highly skilled and experienced delivery practitioners, we ensure the pragmatic application of best practices in project management.

Our proven and referenced expertise lies in delivering R40m to R300m projects. Established in 1997, Tharollo's outstanding project-delivery capabilities are exemplified by a 100% success-rate in all its consulting engagements.

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

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