

Programme Sponsor – Any Takers?

With the backdrop of over 70% of strategic programmes failing through delays, exceeding budgets and failing to deliver to expectation, successful and timely delivery of the strategic programme is equally as important as the original decision to follow a particular multi-million euro strategic path.

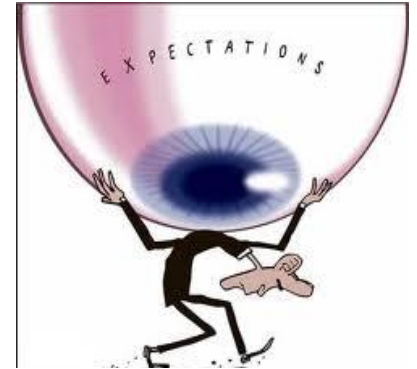
Possessing the ability to continuously achieve 'Business Benefit Realisation' through successful programme delivery is now a key market differentiator in enabling 'competitive advantage'.

And who is held accountable for successful strategic programme delivery?

Critically, accountability falls on the Head of a Senior Manager or Director in their assigned role of 'Programme Sponsor' for delivery and realisation of the programme benefits.

What does it take to be a successful sponsor?

A closer look at the wider environmental factors is needed to fully understand the challenges of the role and how the pressures and the stresses can be successfully managed.



1. The Economic Challenge

Decreasing revenues and reduced ARPUs resulting from the economic downturn, increased regulatory influences, (as experienced in cuts to Mobile Termination Rates) and a highly competitive market, ensure EBITDA has become the key metric, as OPEX takes a greater focus in determining profits.

With increasing scrutiny placed on P&L, hard earned profits are committed in return for *qualified* strategic benefits which enable competitive advantage. The importance of successfully delivering these strategic benefits becomes business critical and often takes on a high stakes profile. As a consequence, sponsors find themselves exposed to increased risk to reward ratios for delivery and the consequential effects on their reputations.

2. Risk or Reward

The imbalance of expectation, (time, budget and resource) is generally the root cause of strategic programme failure. Programmes on high pressure and sometimes accelerated time lines, fall short, not delivering to expectation or fail completely.

As the benefit loss may include 'business critical' need, the visibility of the programme failure is high throughout an organisation, with the sponsor "guilty" through association. Sponsors are only too aware of their company's own track record and the emphasis towards risk rather than reward, to them personally.

3. Delivering Business Benefit to Expectation

Strategic programmes are often doomed for under delivery or failure even before execution of delivery even starts. In too many cases, expectations are inaccurately set, as a lack of detailed planning plays second fiddle to the demand to start the delivery process in earnest. The wholly incorrect perception being, that additional time and cost will be added onto an already pressurised need for 'First to Market' status.

As the result, the 'Best Guesstimate' culture over timelines, resources and budgets prevail, and as a result the Sponsor and programme team are left exposed right from the early stages with little chance of achieving the expectations. Vendor's 'change control champions' rub their hands together at the potential to take full advantage.

During the delivery process it becomes evident to Stakeholders and the Sponsor that the original expectations will not be met. Pressurised and hurried re-planning results, in an attempt to bring the timelines back to an acceptable level to salvage any budgetary and time expectations. Quality and the business case benefits become lost in the midst of reactive decision making. Scope is reduced and a 'Like for Like' solution results, adding limited contribution to the overall business strategy.

Whilst structured process and detailed planning play an integral part in contributing towards success, there are specialised skills required for executing the successful delivery of complex strategic programmes. Do you have the correctly aligned skills to successfully deliver your programme?

All too often within a company, securing *any* personnel often takes precedence over the difficult decisions on what resource profiles are *actually* required. A de-facto decision on resource fulfilment is often made at a crucial stage, when the programme sponsor should be making more considered choices over their programme management and delivery teams.

How can a Sponsor Gain Confidence in Delivery?

Sponsors need assurance that the business case is achievable and the risks are known and managed, and that they have a team capable of delivering success in place for the duration of the programme.

- Upfront Assurance

A 'due diligence' exercise is most effective if undertaken at the early planning stages. Due diligence is integral in producing and feeding accurate data into the business case analysis, quantifying return on investment, strategic objectives and accurately setting expectations for all concerned from the outset.

- Experience and Skills

The Programme Manager and team commissioned to conduct this initial exercise must have the appropriate skills, experience and business acumen to not only initially produce this type of upfront critical information but also have the appropriate proven skills to execute and deliver the plan to expectation.

Only when the right resource, extensive planning and effective and measurable controls are ALL in place, should execution of the programme commence with confidence. The sponsor can now move from a position of hesitation into one of re-assurance. Foundations of trust now exist that the business plan can be reasonably achieved and a realistic opportunity exists to enhance the sponsor's reputation and career.

Risks and Accountability

With a fuller understanding of the detail of the programme, fixed price commercial agreements, supported by measurable milestone delivery payments and governance process should result in reducing company and sponsor risks. High levels of risk and accountability are shared between vendors and suppliers alike, ensuring common agendas – timely delivery, to budget.

Due to high degrees of visibility, control and governance, the sponsor assumes a more directorial role in contribution to the successful delivery of the programme objectives. The relationship and levels of trust between the Sponsor and the Programme Manager take on a 'partnership' arrangement, as both, rely on the other's skills to jointly drive the agreed plan, navigate any 'bottlenecks' and ultimately deliver the business benefits to expectation.

Summary

With over 70% of strategic execution programmes failing through delays, exceeding budgets and failing to deliver to expectation. The stakes are high for the company and for the individual, assigned as Sponsor.

In the role of Programme Sponsor you have a responsibility to seek and gain assurance from commencement and throughout the delivery process.

As Sponsor your assurance can be gained through

- An upfront fully detailed due diligence and planning exercise.
- A trusted 'partnership' in combining the skills of the Sponsor and Programme Manager
- The effectiveness of control measurements throughout the execution process.

Gaining assurance will result in your programme achieving 'Benefit Realisation' status and with it, the appropriate levels of reward and recognition.