



Martin Cukierman

Identify business needs for success

SIMPLY IDENTIFYING ONES business needs at any point in time is not enough to ensure the success and sustainability of operations, services and benefits. Even if, after identifying those needs, you institute current project management techniques, it will not be sufficient to guarantee stated outcomes; much more is needed. Most organizations understand the need to define outcomes and focus on results – and that measuring performance, managing risks and serving their customers/clients with accountability and value are necessary ingredients for successful outcomes. However projects, particularly large-scale complex ones with multiple stakeholders, are still failing at alarming rates despite efforts in both the public and private sectors to solve the problem.

Both sectors have attempted to improve project management through various techniques and have made efforts at enhancing service delivery, but even with the best of intentions they remain frustrated. The lack of meaningful results and outcomes is due in part to the fact that organizations tend to operate on a set of unproven assumptions concerning project objectives, business requirements, user expectations, motivations, agendas, schedules, costs, time frames, just to name a few. Such speculations are interpreted as facts in a business model.

Even more insidious is that the assumptions are made at a fixed point in time, and little regard, planning or methodology is identified to introduce change until it is often too late. Assuming that business needs are constant over the lifecycle of a project is risky and dangerous – priorities shift, people change, governments change, and needs are in a constant state of flux.

How are you to cope with this constant change? Part of the answer lies in a framework that embraces change and establishes processes from the outset that manage the structural risks that plague virtually all projects. The key is to address the structural risks by aligning the project environment and deliverables continuously with the situational analysis that presents itself.

As stakeholder objectives, strategies and priorities change and evolve, unaligned interests must be appropriately synchronized. Management must communicate and provide the delivery team with strategic direction to match the changing needs of the business and its stakeholders. To achieve desired outcomes, business cases should be developed with a true understanding of success factors, implementation factors, and methods for realizing and harvesting benefits. From the outset, business cases must be aligned with reality, should incorporate procedures for ongoing alignment and, most importantly, focus on benefit realization factors rather than merely focusing on project results. Focusing on the core factors required to satisfy benefits (needs) – not just bringing the project in on time and within budget – increases the chances of success.

As business needs are identified in accordance with evolving risk management issues and changing organizational objectives and culture, how can you maintain alignment continuously

throughout the lifecycle of a project? Methodologies that incorporate collaboration – both vertically and horizontally within an organization as well as with outside stakeholders – are effective, and must permeate the lifecycle of the initiative in order to achieve sustainable benefit realization. Such collaboration may be achieved through the use of dynamic governance, accountability and performance management processes, along with programs designed to facilitate collaborative convergence such as the use of a relationship-based model that aligns the organization and its external partnership relations.

Focus on outcomes rather than only on results that are measurable units of improvements at a specific moment in time. An outcome is associated with a set of characteristics or benefits that describe the desired state in broad terms and as such is dynamic, whereas results are static. The benefits of such outcomes will have different meanings and implications at the various stages of the lifecycle of a project.

Identifying business needs based on outcome centric planning, and employing processes designed to continuously align the changing landscape quickly and efficiently will improve the success ratio of major projects. Focusing at the outset on the factors that must be enabled by management to achieve expected benefits, and the measures and processes required to attain and sustain those benefits will also be important to project success. Regardless of the business needs identified today, if those needs are not continuously aligned with changing realities, and if they are not based on outcomes that are dependent on certain factors to be realized, then the efforts to achieve those needs will likely be doomed. ~~~

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