QAO better practice guide—Delivering successful technology projects
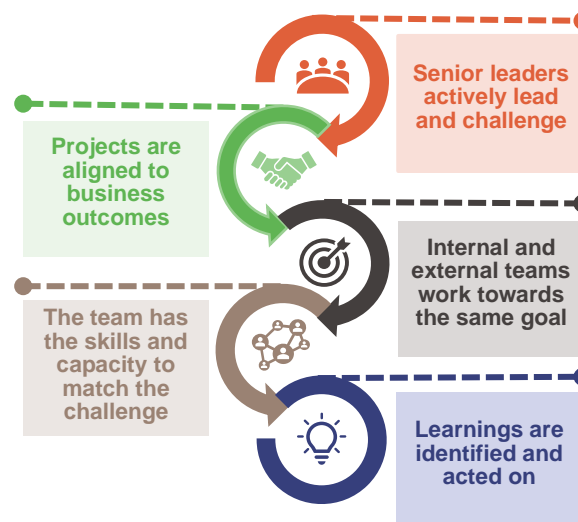
Technology is critical for delivering government services such as health and education, and support functions like payroll and finance. So citizens can access government services online, the public sector needs to adopt and adapt to new and emerging technology services. Unfortunately, many technology projects do not hit their deadlines, stay within budget, or achieve their objectives. This paper summarises our insights from our report *Delivering successful technology projects* (Report 7: 2020–21), and provides five factors that, if managed and modified to suit, can help improve the success of projects. No one factor is more important than another; it is the combination and integration of them all that can make a difference.

Projects align with business outcomes

Many technology projects in government are started to avoid the cost of a failure in a legacy system. However, modern technologies have the potential to deliver broader business outcomes than the existing systems.

Key points

- Keeping changes to the new system to a minimum and adapting business processes to new ways of working.
- Agreeing on a minimum acceptable product at the start of the project.
- Integrating the technical solution into business processes as the project progresses.
- Building agility into the project so that it can change with business needs over time, especially if the project is expected to run over multiple years.

Projects are aligned to business outcomes

Senior leaders actively lead and challenge

Internal and external teams work towards the same goal

The team has the skills and capacity to match the challenge

Learnings are identified and acted on

Senior leaders actively lead and challenge

Technology projects create significant organisational change and carry an elevated risk. Senior leadership teams must understand the projects and ensure they are well run.

Key points

- Senior leadership teams have or bring in skills to independently challenge project deliverables.
- The organisation has the ability and appetite for the number of change programs in progress.
- Business cases for the projects continue to be viable and benefits are relevant over time.
- Independently challenge project planning, progress reports, and performance to ensure they are realistic and based on sound evidence.

Skills and capacity to match the challenge

Technology projects require technical competencies and capability including change management, project management, and contract management.

Key points

- Subject matter experts have proven capability in delivering similar projects.
- There is a cultural fit with the external suppliers and the supplier provides the talent and skills they promised.
- The right people are available and have sufficient time to manage their responsibilities.
- The team has the flexibility to adapt with changes in the business environment as the project progresses.

Learnings are identified and acted on

Project teams that identify and act on learnings from their project experience, and from the experiences of others, are more likely to change their course when needed.

Key points

- At the start, document learnings in similar projects and address any risks likely to occur in the project.
- Take sufficient and timely actions to change course when reports show that the project is deteriorating against its key performance indicators.
- Share key learnings with all stakeholders and other project teams within the public sector.
- At project closure, document how learnings were addressed and make it available for other projects.

Internal and external teams

Technology projects regularly rely on external suppliers. Project leaders need to ensure that internal and external teams are working towards the same outcomes and goals.

Key points

- Include incentives in the contracts to deliver the right outcomes for the business with a clear description of the solution and the time and effort needed for it to be ready for use.
- Design contracts to balance risks and rewards across all parties, creating incentives for performance.
- Align milestone payments with agreed deliverables as they relate to progress in delivering the solution.
- Clearly articulate roles, responsibilities, time frames, and deliverables for all parties.