Success Through Leadership, Governance and Accountability

Drive positive business outcomes through successful transformation initiatives.

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The Road to Successful IT Strategic Planning

Your IT Strategic Planning Process doesn't have to be a long and winding road.

In life, plans are good. You probably have a plan for your daily commute. In public sector agencies, IT strategic plans are necessary. IT strategic plans are the vehicle used to ensure that the Agency is optimizing how it leverages technology to create value for the Agency. They are the on ramps to arrive at short- and long-term organization objectives. But creating a strategic plan takes effort and, well, planning. In this article we take a panoramic look at the 8 steps that span a successful IT strategic planning process.

The Road to Successful IT Strategic Planning

1. Get on Board – Identify Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder assessment
In IT and outside of IT
Include internal and external
May want to include input from customers

The first step toward successful IT strategic planning is stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders hold the keys to input, feedback, resources, and support. Having them on board is essential. What is the best way to go about this? Include them in the planning process from the start. This helps ensure that IT initiatives receive the necessary support and resources to successfully implement. Your planning team might include:

- IT leadership – of course!
- Agency executives
- Senior and middle managers
- Technical and support staff
- Customers/citizens
- Former leaders of the organization
- A trusted advisor to provide leadership, governance, and accountability throughout the process

These stakeholders are now your planning team. They will play an important role in formulating the IT strategic planning process.

2. Rules of the Road – Establish Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines

Establish planning process and timelines
Clearly define guiding principles
Establish parameters

Rules are created for a reason – at least they should be. Help the IT strategic planning team be efficient and effective. Adopt procedures that support the planning process, the planning team itself, and information about the IT strategic plan. This will help team members understand their roles and responsibilities for the duration. Include a governance model to establish a clear decision-making process throughout the planning journey and procedures for addressing the planning timeline and budget.

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Validate or create a set of IT guiding principles. These principles create the structure or rules that need to be considered when developing the IT strategic plan. Guiding principles should inform 1) What decisions should be made, 2) How decisions should be made, and 3) Who can make and enforce decisions along with parameters to be applied in decision making. An example would be "We optimize first, buy off the shelf second, and customize/build as a last resort".

3. Know Where You're Going - Define Future State

Identify target IT maturity level
Identify strategies to close gaps and improve performance
Raise the bar, innovate to move the needle on Agency goals and objectives
Maximize value to the organization

Begin with the end in mind. It seems natural to start with understanding your current state. However, the best approach is to start your strategic planning by clearly defining your desired future state. Taking this approach will allow you to focus on the IT function from the perspective of how it adds value to the Agency. When you begin with current state there is a tendency to focus on ways to improve IT (internally IT focused). Instead, look at the value the IT function can deliver to the Agency.

4. Know Where You Are - Assess Current State

Assess current IT maturity level
Gather feedback from business and IT stakeholders
Assess current alignment with business goals and objectives
Identify gaps/opportunities

Know where you are starting from. A solid understanding how IT currently functions and derives value for the organization is necessary before formulating any plans to move the organization forward.

Understand ITs current state by gathering information and feedback from stakeholders in a variety of ways. Information gathering can include employee surveys, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and any number of assessments. Leverage industry benchmarks and maturity models; you do not have to reinvent the wheel.

An inventory of IT capabilities is critical to developing a strategic plan. Knowing the current level of IT capabilities and their direct alignment to realized value lays the foundation for planning improvements that will optimize performance in the future.

5. Know Why You're Going – Align Goals and Objectives

Understand Agency goals and objectives
Define IT vision *(desired future state – what you want to be)*
Define IT mission *(purpose and how to achieve vision)*
Set IT goals and objectives *(how will progress be measured)*

As with any trip it is important that you know the big picture and why you are going. With IT strategic planning this begins by clearly understanding the Agency goals and objectives. The planning team should keep the value the Agency wants to create directly in their line of sight. Aligning IT objectives and goals to Agency objectives ensures that IT initiatives, operations, planning, and leadership are synchronized to drive value for the organization. This will accelerate positive outcomes when the Plan is implemented.

This level of synchronization is accomplished by establishing a clearly defined and realistic IT vision and mission aligned with the vision and mission of the Agency. This will provide a unified focus and direction for the IT organization. It will also challenge them to think and move beyond current strategies to achieve the vision and mission.

In support of achieving the IT Vision and Mission the organization should develop goals and objectives to measure progress towards the envisioned future state.

When IT objectives are successfully aligned with Agency objectives, you see:
- Consensus around IT investments
- Improved decision-making about IT priorities
- Compatible and supported long-terms goals
- Agreement on ITs role throughout the organization

Continued

6. Map How You'll Get There - Develop the IT Roadmap

Review prior roadmaps/plans; identify keep, stop, and continue initiatives
Identify new initiatives needed to achieve the desired future state
Prioritize initiatives based on strategic alignment, cost, risk, and complexity
Develop initiative roadmap
Determine budget impact/needs

With the starting point and desired destination clearly defined it is now time to clearly define how to get there. This is done by creating a technology roadmap to outline how the Agency will cross the bridge from the current state to arrive at the plan's desired future state.

The IT roadmap should address which initiatives should start, stop, and continue. They should also address specific improvements to IT operations, staffing, security, and any other functions where making improvements will clearly derive additional value for the Agency. The roadmap should include any resources required to make the trip including the overall budget.

A roadmap also ensures that technology and infrastructure investments are aligned to meet the short-term and long-term objectives of the Agency.

7. Are You There Yet? - Measure Progress

Identify key portfolio initiative metrics
Set targets
Develop a monthly (minimum) dashboard
Implement leadership, governance, and accountability for each initiative
Implement weekly dashboards for each initiative (include cost, time, and quality metrics)
Review progress regularly and formally at least monthly
Take corrective action

Once the IT strategic planning process is complete, hold your Agency accountable to implement it on time and on budget. Check your team's progress frequently along the way.

Formal metrics are necessary to keep an eye on the road ahead and create common goals that bind all parties to the plan itself. In addition to tracking key IT operational metrics set up metrics to track the progress of key initiative and the value IT is driving for the Agency.

Most importantly, these metrics need to be monitored and corrective action taken to make sure you continue on the path to your desired destination.

8. Do You Still Want to Go There? - Review and Revise

Review Agency goals and objectives along with the IT Strategic Plan regularly and formally, at least quarterly
Make adjustments

Do not let the finished IT strategic plan collect dust like an old atlas. Ensure success by reviewing it regularly. Track progress and make updates as unexpected factors alter its course.

Present the Strategic Plan to Agency executives, senior management, IT staff, and other key stakeholders. Publish it for internal, and sometimes external, distribution depending on Agency requirements. It is important to establish a regular planning cycle to keep the IT strategic plan current and aligned with the Agency's goals and objectives.

Final Destination

The path of an IT strategic planning process does not have to be a long and winding road.
Follow these 8 steps of strategic planning and arrive at your intended destination successfully:
1. Identify Key Stakeholders
2. Establish Policies, Procedures & Guidelines
3. Define Future State
4. Assess Current State
5. Align Goals and Objectives
6. Develop the IT Roadmap
7. Measure Progress
8. Review and Revise

Digital article: *The Road to IT Strategic Planning*
Download: *IT Strategic Planning Checklist*
Download: *IT Strategic Planning infographic*

What is Business-IT Alignment and Why Does it Matter?

What is Business-IT Alignment?

As you can imagine, there is no universal blueprint for businesses that successfully fulfill their purpose and achieve their mission. However, most leaders agree that Strategic Alignment is one of the critical contributing factors. When all elements of a business, much like rowers on a boat working in unison, are in sync the result is Strategic Alignment. They work together with the sole purpose of fulfilling the business objectives. While the concept sounds simple, achieving alignment can be a complicated and evolutionary process. A company's purpose generally does not change, but department level strategies and organizational structures do, which can make chasing alignment feel like rowing in circles! With a robust framework and governance structure in place this process can be simplified, and its results sustained.

Faced with limited resources, Agency leaders should prioritize business components with higher potential for transformation, such as Information Technology (IT). Nobody can challenge the power that IT has to transform businesses and indeed entire industries. To do so, however, IT must evolve beyond its traditional role of a cost center that supports the business and become an innovator that provides competitive advantage for the business.

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What is Business-IT Alignment and Why Does it Matter?

Good IT Strategy

One critical enabler of effective and long-lasting Business-IT Alignment is a well-crafted and continuously fine-tuned IT Strategy along with the IT operational capabilities needed to achieve the IT Strategy. Business stakeholders usually lack the technology perspective and knowledge to translate business objectives into IT initiatives that can help achieve them. IT leaders need to work together with the business to define the IT Strategy.

A good IT Strategy:
- Clearly links IT initiatives to business goals and objectives,
- Optimizes IT capabilities to realize them, and
- Adds additional IT capabilities to leverage new or previously unused technologies in support of achieving business goals and objectives

Do you think your Agency has an IT Strategy that is designed to support the goals and objectives of your business? Does your IT organization have the capabilities needed to support your IT Strategy? Are your Business and IT well aligned?

Business-IT Alignment Assessment

Take a short 15-question survey that MSS Business Transformation Advisory (MSSBTA) has developed, that can provide a good indication of your Agency's current alignment. At the end of the assessment, you will receive a score and a brief commentary.

If your assessment returns a near perfect score, congratulations! your organization is aligned in most of the assessed areas. For most of us though, the reality is that IT works mostly independent of the business, and a list of IT projects is sometimes all that constitutes an IT Strategy.

Why it Matters

The velocity and magnitude of technology changes today have increased dramatically compared to anything we have seen before. If we are to realize the business value through the adoption of emerging technologies, CIOs and CEOs must address significant challenges. It is time for IT to evolve into a trusted partner, empowering business through innovation and efficiency. The time to act is now!

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What is Business-IT Alignment and Why Does it Matter?

Optimize Business-IT Alignment

MSSBTA can help. Contact us to perform an in-depth, full Business-IT Alignment Assessment to uncover areas which could use some improvement. Once current state alignment is understood, we can help you develop a roadmap that identifies opportunities for enhancing the harmonious relationship of business and IT.

MSSBTA utilizes a comprehensive methodology that walks you step-by-step through the activities that enable IT Strategy development and Business-IT Alignment. Our methodology uncovers shortcomings between the current state of the IT organization and the ideal target state. It helps develop a roadmap of critical initiatives to achieve the organization's goals.

Digital article: *What is Business-IT Alignment and Why Does it Matter?*
Download: *Business-IT Alignment Checklist*
Link: *Business-IT Alignment Assessment*

Business Requirements Gathering and How to Get it Right

We have all seen the proverbial tree swing story graphic. Twelve independent framed images representing twelve different outcomes of the same business requirements. While amusing, this is reality for many organizations and has a significant impact on project outcomes. According to the Info-Tech Research Group "70% of projects fail due to poor requirements."

Unfortunately, awareness will not provide quality business requirements. You must plan for it. Eliciting and clearly documenting requirements is a skill set. Like any other tool, your ability to effectively use this has a significant impact on the results. Whether you are embarking on an enterprise deployment, or a small cross-functional expansion, the basics need to be covered.

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Business Requirements Gathering Process

Elicit - prepare, conduct, confirm

Analyze - organize, prioritize, verify

Validate - translate, allocate, approve

Business Requirements Gathering and How to Get it Right

Business Requirements Gathering Process

Business requirements gathering is necessary to create a shared vision within your business. The importance of engaging, eliciting, and prioritizing requirements with all impacted stakeholders is critical. Requirements gathering is most effective with a robust process and a strong Business Analyst. The framework below illustrates a comprehensive requirements gathering approach consisting of a Requirements Gathering Process (Elicit, Analyze, Validate) and a Requirements Governance Process (Plan, Monitor, Communicate and Manage).

The standard approach to gathering requirements includes three core activities: Elicit, Analyze, and Validate.
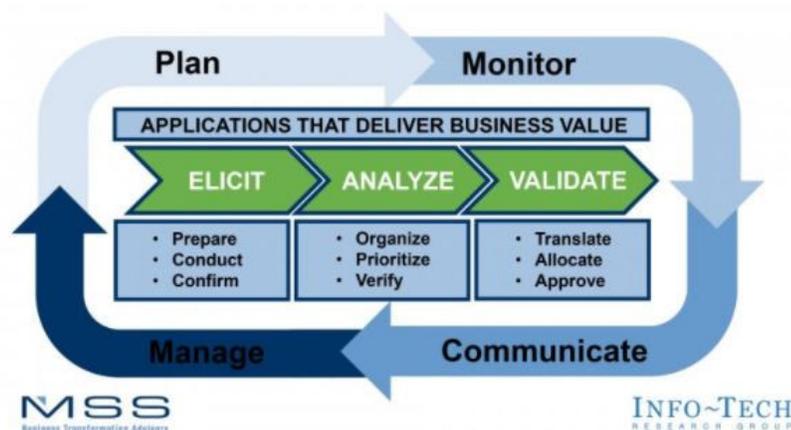
Elicit Phase

One of the common traps is selecting a technological solution before fully examining the business need first. **Prepare** your elicitation approach. Identify your stakeholders and elicitation tools such as BPM, SIPOCs, brainstorming sessions, interviews or focus groups. Put in place an elicitation process with a top-down approach, starting with senior management. Take advantage of generating a transformational change by reinventing a process instead of fixing small deficiencies in the current one.

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Conduct the elicitation process to identify the business processes the application will need to support and identify the "as is" process and how to improve upon it. A strong elicitor will have a blend of industry knowledge, core analytical thinking, and proficiency in BA tools. Who did you bring into the elicitation? Did you bring in the right people? Participants, at minimum, should include customers, end users, business analysts, system analysts, testers, and business sponsor(s). Avoid focusing on just the functional requirements. Make sure you examine all regulatory, business, user, functional, non-functional, and transition requirements as well.

Confirm the understanding of each requirement using active listening skills, and revise as needed.

According to Info-Tech Research Group requirements should be:
- **Verifiable** – Stated in a way that can be easily tested
- **Unambiguous** – Free of subjective terms and can only be interpreted in one way
- **Complete** – Contains all relevant information
- **Achievable** – Possible to accomplish with budgetary and technological constraints
- **Traceable** – Trackable from inception through to testing
- **Unitary** – Addresses only one thing and cannot be decomposed into multiple requirements
- **Agnostic** – Does not pre-suppose a specific vendor or product

Analyze Phase

This phase defines the solution scope. Ensure you organize and prioritize the features based on importance, effort, and resource considerations. Also, verify they address the original business goals. Using the right tools to analyze the information such as flowcharts, context-level data flow diagrams, use case diagrams and scenarios, swim lane activity process flows, and process models, can help represent a meaningful, easy-to-understand business requirements document.

Organize requirements to eliminate duplicates and identify relationships and dependencies. Creating specific and clear requirements is the end goal. **Prioritize** requirements using established organizational core values as weighed measures or simply use the MoSCoW (must-haves, should-haves, could-haves, and will not have at this time) prioritization method. Finally, **verify** all information is captured as it was intended with your SMEs.

Validate Phase

Validate the complete business requirements package with the stakeholders. This approval process provides a final opportunity for the voice of the customer to confirm and verify the package represents all their prioritized business needs. It mobilizes stakeholder commitment and minimizes future change requests. In this phase, all requirements are **translated** into technical requirements. For traceability, all requirements should have a requirements traceability matrix that link back to test cases.

All testing opportunities should be **allocated** to the proper team and test scenarios. Identify who will do the testing and at what stage (Functional, UAT, System Integration, Performance, Penetration). Requirements should be verified by domain SMEs to ensure that the analyzed requirements continue to meet their needs.

Obtain final **approval** via signature sign-off. Use the sign-off process as one last opportunity to manage expectations, obtain commitment from stakeholders, and minimize change requests. The complete business requirement package should include:
- Project summary and background
- Operating model
- Business process model
- Use cases
- Requirements elicitation techniques
- Prioritized requirements
- Assumptions and constraints
- Signature page

Digital article: *Business Requirements Gathering and How to Get it Right*
Download: *Validating Business Requirements infographic*
Link: *Requirements Management Maturity Review*

Build a Robust Business Case That Measures Project Success

When building a business case it is time we rethink how we measure project success.

Let us start with some introspection. As a leader, how many times have you heard a transformation project successfully fulfilled the operational and financial benefits as laid out in its business case? Now, think of the number of times you heard that a project was successfully delivered under budget and on schedule.

If you had difficulty thinking of a single project that measured success as "Meeting business case objectives" and not "Delivered on schedule and under budget", you are NOT alone. Almost 50% of transformation projects do not even quantify benefits or draw up a robust business case! These are literally once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to generate value for organizations. As a result, two-thirds of those without a business case do not track value delivered once the project is labeled complete.

Both of those scenarios are squandered opportunities to create true differentiation in the marketplace. Is it really a surprise to hear that ROI on transformation programs is usually disappointing? Almost 70% of transformation programs deliver less than 50% of their targeted value. That is not what anyone would consider success!

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Build a Robust Business Case That Measures Project Success

Build a Business Case

A well-thought-out business case is a promise of a better future, based on educated, consensus-driven assumptions and projections. At MSS Business Transformation Advisory (MSSBTA), we strongly believe large transformation efforts need to be clearly articulated and thought-out, detailing the operational and financial drivers of value (both qualitative and quantitative). MSSBTA uses a proven, holistic methodology that combines a top-down approach (based on goals, market analysis, and industry benchmarks) with a bottom-up approach (historical performance, leadership inputs, and proforma projections), to formulate a realistic and strong business case.

Measure Results to Capture Value

Creation of the business case is only one half of the story. We have documented the targeted value by which success will be measured. In return, leaders owe it to their organizations to ensure that delivered value meets or exceeds targeted value.

At MSSBTA, we have developed a Value Tracking and Maximizing methodology that can drive effective capture of value. Along with strong, ongoing oversight, our approach enables you to identify and pull the right value levers. Pulling them in the correct sequence can influence desired outcomes and help capture benefits faster.

For example, in a new inventory system transformation, one possible driver of financial value is working capital reduction. One of the levers we can pull with the transformation is improved forecasting capabilities. Ensuring the identified lever is truly engaged across the organization, we can assure the targeted benefits are realized.

It is high time we stopped measuring project success solely based on schedule and budget. The true test of project success is "Did we accomplish what we set out to achieve?".

Digital article: *Build a Robust Business Case that Measures Project Success*
Download: *Business Case PIJ Checklist*

Success Through Leadership, Governance, and Accountability

Applying Leadership, Governance, and Accountability

Congratulations! Your transformation initiative's budget has been approved and the project is a Go! Conventional wisdom dictates that you start by bringing onboard a project manager (PM) and begin the project initiation and planning activities. As the person who has overall responsibility for the successful planning, execution, controlling, and closure of a project, the PM is one of the most important roles on the project. In addition to a strong project manager, you need a consulting organization that has a proven methodology, approach, and tools to ensure the successful execution of a project. Effective transformation oversight requires a consulting company that understands how to deliver success through leadership, governance, and accountability.

Many organizations believe they have the internal capability to fill the project manager (PM) role. If the initiative is an Information Technology (IT) project, the systems integrator (SI) or the independent software vendor (ISV) might have their own PM to manage their team's activities. While it might be expeditious for you to just rely on their PM, and/or your internal resources, there are serious risks inherent in this approach. To ensure success, the PM must be willing to hold all parties (external and internal) accountable regardless of their role in the project. Therefore, it is *vital* that you select an independent company that has no conflict of interest, and a singular focus on driving the project to successful completion.

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Success Through Leadership, Governance, and Accountability

MSS Business Transformation Advisory (MSSBTA) is a technology-agnostic, trusted advisor to our clients. We place your interest above all else in pursuit of a successful implementation. Our project managers use a project oversight structure called **Leadership, Governance, and Accountability (LGA)**, which addresses critical success factors beyond the traditional project management responsibilities. Properly executed, LGA minimizes risk, ensures sustainable project success, and drives positive business outcomes.

Leadership

"Most projects are over-managed and under-led," Jim Highsmith notes in his book Agile Project Management. In transformation projects, when projects run into problems requiring innovative ideas and approaches, the traditional tool-and-process focused style of pure-play project managers will not suffice. MSSBTA's Leadership ensures:
- Clearly defined business outcomes aligned with organization strategy
- Complete and validated contracts and a project plan aligned across all stakeholders
- One point of contact to oversee and manage all aspects of the initiative

Governance

Through the second tenet of our oversight structure, Governance, MSSBTA establishes a strong management framework for the project, driven by PMBOK ® leading practices. Effective governance results in:
- Clearly defined decision-making process
- Roles, responsibilities, and expectations aligned with the project goals and objectives
- Clear expectations regarding communication and meeting cadence

Accountability

With several participants involved in a project, there will undoubtedly be occasions when stakeholders will "pass the buck". They will blame each other for missed schedule, budget, and quality commitments. It is critical to establish a rigorous Accountability framework. Establish ownership, proactively identify, escalate, and resolve issues. When you choose MSSBTA to manage your project, we take accountability for the overall success of the initiative. We will ensure that:
- All contributors are held accountable for meeting commitments
- Quality standards are met
- Initiative outcomes are delivered within budget
- On-time Go-live is achieved

Digital article: *Success Through Leadership, Governance, and Accountability*
Download: *10 Benefits of Leadership, Governance, and Accountability*
Download: *3 Components of Transformation Oversight*
Video: *Keith Latchaw Talks Leadership, Governance, and Accountability*

Contact Us

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