Partnering for Project Success

How to select and work with
IT partners to ensure your
system project succeeds

![Peacock engineering logo]

In a world reliant on Information Technology, maximising system uptime is key. IT is intrinsic to most organisations' operations; it would be almost impossible for them to function without it.

Business demands enterprise IT solutions need to be fully operational at all times – even while system changes are being made, and new solutions added.

Ideally, IT projects will be completed:

- smoothly and efficiently
- on time
- within budget
- with the intended business benefit fully achieved

However, you do not have to spend very long searching the internet to establish that not all IT projects go this way. Some fail completely, costing time and money as well as leaving clients unsure as to what went wrong and with no easy route to move forward.

Did you know that…

- Only 55% of IT managers understand their IT projects' business objectives [1]
- 75% of executives who implement software projects believe the project will fail [2]
- 31% of organisations never realise anticipated benefits from their projects [3]

It's clear that to ensure IT project success, care needs to be taken at every stage.

The reasons for IT project failure
There are many reasons for IT project failure, including lack of ownership, inadequate project management, poor change management and a lack of trained and experienced resources available to support the project. Lack of executive sponsorship is also a major cause of failure. If a project does not have C-Level support to help drive it forward, it will struggle at every stage.

Projects need the right people. Depending on your commitments, you may not have the correct resources or skill sets to manage the entire project in-house. With enterprise systems becoming increasingly cloud-based, additional specialist skillsets are required to successfully implement them. In these circumstances, you may well turn to a System Integrator (SI) or other partners and suppliers for help.

Partner companies can help you to:

- Plan for success
- Increase speed and clarity of communication
- Ensure your budgeting accurately reflects the work required
- Provide the skills needed to implement complex solutions

System Integrators may be excellent generalists but could lack the specialist skills needed to implement complex systems such as an integrated Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) solution.

EAM systems require inputs from a wide range of sources, including legacy systems, IoT, and mobile devices, and may also have hundreds of concurrent users. This complexity can lead to additional costs and time delays, which extend the time to achieve the desired return on investment. It is fundamental that you identify which partner businesses have the capability to support your objectives and can help deliver project success.

Provide crystal clear requirement criteria
Before project commencement, your organisation must establish clear business objectives and outcomes it wants to achieve. In larger organisations, with various internal departments, teams and stakeholders, it can sometimes be difficult to delineate these objectives.

For projects where you may be working with several external partners, it is also critical that all parties use the same language and technical terminology, to avoid misinterpretation. Your primary integration partner should have expertise in your industry, and will be able to help you clearly define your requirements, objectives and expected outcomes, using project terminology that all other partners will understand.

Next, ensure all internal and external business partners, directly or indirectly involved in your project, are invited to contribute to the project success criteria, and the outcomes and timelines you are expecting to achieve.

These outcomes and timelines must be realistic and accepted as such by all contributing partners, with a forum established to discuss the project deliverables, timelines and challenges. This enables all parties to discuss deliverable sequencing, and what can and cannot be delivered within the timeframe.

In other words, expectation setting is a two-way street. There is little point in setting a deadline that cannot be achieved. By engaging with expert partners early in the process, you can establish a realistic timeframe that all parties can agree on.

Choose a partner that knows your industry
Industry knowledge and expertise should be a prerequisite when selecting any potential partner. For example, a Utility business with widespread locations and physical assets may require an extended roll out to enable sufficient training time of a disparate workforce. During this time requirements and technologies could change significantly and your potential partner should be aware of these challenges and understand how to incorporate change into a successful delivery.

Early planning is the key.

As we have already understood, many projects fail due to an oversight in the early planning phases of the project. Many organisations state that 50% of their time is spent on project rework. This could be largely eradicated by better early planning, and particularly by early involvement from an integration partner, with specific expertise in the required solution.

Set clear roles and responsibilities

During the course of any project, there may be differences of opinion and interpretation. Creating a mechanism where these can be evaluated and resolved quickly is critical for success.

This includes:

- Creation of a forum where issues, concerns and changes can be raised
- empowering all parties to raise issues
- agreeing a mechanism to efficiently resolve issues

This may mean change is required, but to reiterate, if the goals and objectives are fully understood and experts are involved in driving the plan, the changes will be kept to a minimum, keeping costs and timelines on course.

Your integration partner should also be able to help by providing a range of development methodologies - using 'Agile' rather than traditional 'Waterfall' development methodology, or a combination, can help to minimise differences and required change. In the Agile model, the project is divided into a series of smaller, short timeline activities, known as 'Sprints', each of which is developed individually. This gives the client regular opportunities to review the deliverables, and ensure they meet the project objective.

Communicate clearly and often

By optimising communication with your integration partner, you increase the likelihood of project success.

Ways of achieving improved communication include:

- setting a project governance matrix
- having regular face to face meetings
- clear, concise, unambiguous documentation
- Adopting a "measure twice, cut once" approach

Team morale is critical to a successful project and creating a clear communication mechanism can make a huge difference to the project team and the sponsors.

Understand your limitations

When planning for your IT project, your organisation will benefit from reviewing the in-house and external skill sets, and any other resources you may need. An IT project needs your best people - not simply those that are readily available.

There will be strengths and weaknesses, which need to be acknowledged, so the right skills and resources are engaged at the appropriate phases of your project.
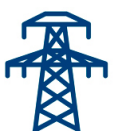
Avoid creating overlap and duplication.

When engaging partners to assist with a project, it makes little sense to have several partners who all have the same skillsets. So we recommend that you evaluate the project needs at the broadest level, and engage with a partner who best meets the criteria. This might result in appointing both an expert niche integrator, as well as a more generalist SI with broader skills.

However, fewer organisations involved in the delivery can lead to greater success. If your niche partner can deliver a wider remit as well, it can make sense to keep all of the work with your niche partner, as this is likely to result in less duplication of work, less confusion, and faster completion.

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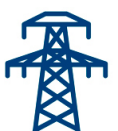In summary, your organisation needs to ensure you have:

- 'C' level Business support for your project
- Clear objectives that articulate the desired business value
- The right people and resources on the team
- Team availability to work within the schedule defined
- All internal and external partners are engaged and committed to the deliverables and timelines
- Communication is constant, clear and unambiguous
- Acknowledge when milestones and goals are achieved across the whole team
- Plan for success – and expect it!

By doing all of the above, your organisation will set itself up for IT project success.

Peacock Engineering are experienced solution implementation experts, and have a proven track record in helping organisations complete projects on-time, on-budget, and with all the expected benefits and outcomes.

Sources:
1. https://www.geneca.com/why-up-to-75-of-software-projects-will-fail/
2. https://www.geneca.com/why-up-to-75-of-software-projects-will-fail/
3. https://www.wellingtone.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-State-of-Project-Management-Survey-2016.pdf

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