

Preparation Pays: The Technology Buyer's Role in Implementation Success

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Introduction

Having the right technology infrastructure is vital to an organization's success in today's digitally enabled world. Organizations embarking on a technology selection, whether it be for hardware or software, are spoiled for choice in the variety of products and solutions available from vendors across the globe. Should an organization decide to hire an external service provider, either to help choose that technology or to implement it, there are thousands of digital agencies, systems integrators, and other specialized consultants who offer those services.

Yet despite all these choices, and despite the money and time buyers spend with those choices, an astonishingly high number of technology implementations fall short of success. The [Standish Group](#), a research firm that tracks the state of the software development industry, found in a survey of 50,000 IT projects worldwide that just 29% were

considered to be successful; the rest were either "challenged" (52%) or "failed" (19%).

It is Digital Clarity Group's belief that the success rate should be much higher. To this end, DCG's new VOCalis research initiative is designed to gather data-driven insight into how and why projects fail, and how the three key participants in any given project – the customer, the technology vendor, and the service provider – can avoid these failures.

In 2016, DCG has interviewed a wide range of sponsors of enterprise IT projects in North America and Europe. These interviews add to our knowledge base gained from conducting scores of technology selections for buy-side clients over the last few years. Our analysis of these results is yielding themes around common pain points and pitfalls in these projects.

One major finding: *more often than not, issues having nothing to do with the technology are what*



cause projects to go off the rails. Moreover, in some cases problems could have been avoided if buyers had been better informed about the best ways to work with vendors and service providers and about how to be most effective in ensuring a successful implementation.

Based on research to date, this brief provides three key recommendations for buyers that are planning or beginning technology projects, to ensure that they are set up for the best chance of success:

1. Assemble a team with best-fit capabilities.
2. Agree on a common yardstick of success against which the project will be measured.
3. Prepare for consistent collaboration with vendors and service providers.

Assemble a Team with Best-Fit Capabilities

The composition and experience of the buyer's team are crucial to a successful technology selection. Digital Clarity Group has heard from multiple service providers of cases where the client side team did not have enough knowledge or expertise to understand a project's scope and challenges.

This is not necessarily a problem, for a good service provider can help the client to uncover capability gaps and fill them from its own bench. However, it is a problem if the client does not

admit to having those gaps and instead blames the service provider for issues beyond its control. A client who purchases a .NET WCM system should not expect the service provider to run the system on a Java platform, and yet that is an example one DCG analyst experienced first-hand.

At a minimum, the client-side team should be comprised of individuals in the following roles:

- **Executive sponsor.** This person does not have to be actively involved in the day-to-day details of the project, but should keep senior management informed on its purpose – how it will contribute to the organization – and its progress. Having this liaison to top decision-makers will ensure that the project gets the necessary resources and that it is not sidetracked or derailed by political maneuvering or competition from other parts of the organization. At the same time, the sponsor needs to keep the project team abreast of relevant developments in the organization, such as expected changes in strategy or budgeting processes.
- **Project lead/daily point of contact.** There absolutely must be a designated key contact with whom the vendor and service provider can regularly connect throughout the project. This person should have experience in leading complex projects, and ideally should remain the key contact during the entire implementation so that no important information about progress or problems falls

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through the cracks. An effective project lead will ensure that the right resources and people are available to collaborate with the supplier as needed, and will inform the supplier of any potential organizational issues such as changes in project team members.

- **Strategy lead.** This individual should be able to articulate how the implementation fits into the company's overall strategy and how the implementation will fulfill the organization's business goals and objectives. In the absence of such a person on the client side, the client either needs to hire someone to fill the strategy role or let the service provider fill that gap from its own team.
- **IT lead.** This should be an individual who understands the existing IT infrastructure and can provide requirements that take into account the state of that infrastructure. Infrastructure here includes not just hardware and software, but also people, such as how many developers are currently on staff and their skill levels and experience.
- **Marketing lead.** Digital marketing touches on, and indeed depends upon, a variety of technologies. As an example, a retailer running email campaigns for seasonal promotions uses customer data, product information, and web analytics to determine the right targets, timing, and product assortments for those promotions. For this reason, any technology implementation that will impact digital marketing activities must have an experienced marketing leader on the project team.
- **Measurement and analytics lead.** This should be the person responsible for measuring

the implementation's success. For example, the success of a new website will depend on analyzing metrics involving user behavior and search engine optimization (SEO). Depending on the organization, this may be a business analyst, web-marketing analyst, or product analyst: the key is that it is someone who understands customer data and analytics.

Depending on the type of technology up for selection, other roles are important for the client side project team:

- **A WCM system selection** should have a content strategist and possibly a content contributor, since they will be the primary users of the new system. One common mistake that buyers of WCM systems make, our research shows, is assuming that a new website implementation includes new content for the website. Unless this is written in the service provider contract, this is not usually the case: the implementation team on the service provider side consists of developers who build, test, and deploy the website but do not provide content.
- **A marketing automation platform selection** should have a marketing operations manager, whose team will depend on the new platform to do their jobs, such as setting up and running email campaigns.
- **An e-commerce platform selection** should include a digital merchandising manager, who will be using the system to determine placement and assortments of products on the online store and deciding what items to order from suppliers for future sales.

Agree on a Common Measure of Project Success

All participants in an implementation have a vested interest in seeing it succeed and deliver value. However, DCG research shows that the definitions of success and value vary depending upon whom you ask.

On the surface, it looks like most vendors and suppliers are at least meeting customer expectations. Most project leads among those that DCG surveyed considered their project to have delivered value (61% said good, 18% said average). Yet at the same time, a surprisingly high number of respondents indicated that their projects *missed* deadlines (36%) and *ran over* budget (46%). This hints at a gap in how customers, vendors, and service providers each define success.

Why should this be the case? Both vendors and service providers tend to consider projects as successful if they are delivered on time and on budget to the client's specifications. However, keeping to deadlines and budgets are not necessarily the measures buyers use for determining a successful project, or at least they're not the most important ones. In fact, buyers may actually *expect* that a project will run over time and over budget and build those assumptions into their budgeting processes.

Instead, the buyer may use other criteria to measure value. As one respondent at a global CPG company whose project had gone live explained:

If (we) were to look to buy a WCM system today we would likely not choose (Product X). Product X was sold to us as a platform but in reality it is a product – it has been problematic to use it as a platform and customize/optimize it in different circumstances.

In that project's case, one of the measures of success the client could have established at the beginning was a defined metric for *enterprise adoption*. This would have allowed the vendor and service provider to redefine the implementation's scope so that going live would have been an interim rather than a final stage, and after going live there could have been a period of user training.

One example of an implementation that the buyer considered to be a success based on defined measures comes from a government agency. This agency tasked its vendor and service provider with building a website that would lead to improved operational efficiencies and user satisfaction by making it simple and easy to fill out online grant applications. After the new website implementation, the agency saw hard copy submissions drop by 70% and the number of completed online applications increase by nearly 80%. As a result, the agency realized substantial savings in the time and cost of processing poorly completed applications.

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Prepare for Consistent Collaboration with Vendors and Service Providers

Vendors and service providers have reported that one characteristic they see in successful projects is a high degree of collaboration between the client team and the supplier implementation team. They caution against buyers looking at these engagements as an offshoring exercise, where upon signing the contract the suppliers then go back to their offices and complete the work largely on their own, without client involvement.

A complex technology implementation is not something that can be bought in a neat package and completed off-site by the vendor and service provider in question. Every organization is different and has its own unique infrastructure, culture, and habits. External suppliers need regular information and guidance from the client as to how that organization works and how to navigate it. Examples of questions they may have include:

- Has this project been introduced to the parts of the organization that will be affected, or does that still need to happen?
- What is the organization's structure?
- How do various decisions (budgeting, purchasing, hiring, restructuring) get made?
- Who is empowered to make those decisions?
- In which divisions or geographies do those individuals sit?

Active buyer collaboration with suppliers is more important than ever as more service providers employ “agile” methodologies. Projects run within agile frameworks are iterative in nature, involving frequent meetings where requirements change over time as feedback and data is gathered in each iteration. This contrasts with more traditional “waterfall” projects, where each stage of a project takes place in sequence, and all requirements-gathering and design work is done before any coding takes place.

One of the characteristics of digital initiatives is that they are still very much in the experimental phase. Omnichannel customer experience, for one, is a goal that many companies seek to provide but that few can actually deliver consistently. Buyers therefore need to be willing to roll up their sleeves and dig in with their suppliers to figure out the best solution; to participate in the process rather than be passive observers.

It Pays to Prepare

Up-to-date and flexible technology infrastructure is key for organizations' ability to provide great customer experiences and keep pace in today's digitally enabled world. Given infrastructure's importance and the major investment new implementations require, organizations cannot afford to squander that investment by inadequate preparation. Having a well-rounded and capable team, agreeing up front with suppliers on how success will be measured, and actively collaborating with suppliers throughout the course of the project are three buyer strategies that should lead to a successful technology implementation.

About Digital Clarity Group



Digital Clarity Group is a research-based advisory firm focused on the content, technologies, and practices that drive world-class customer experience. Global organizations depend on our insight, reports, and consulting services to help them turn digital disruption into digital advantage. As analysts, we cover the customer experience management (CEM) footprint – those organizational capabilities and competencies that impact the experience delivered to customers and prospects. In our view, the CEM footprint overlays content management, marketing automation, e-commerce, social media management, collaboration, customer relationship management, localization, and search. As consultants, we believe that education and advice leading to successful CEM is only possible by actively engaging with all participants in the CEM solutions ecosystem. In keeping with this philosophy, we work with enterprise adopters of CEM solutions, technology vendors that develop and market CEM systems and tools, and service providers who implement solutions, including systems integrators and digital agencies.

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