Case study

Project governance as a critical success factor

A large enterprise that was using legacy home-grown applications for managing their sales and customer service business processes decided to embark on a new cloud application, Dynamics 365. This was a mission-critical and complex implementation for this company; it would affect their key business of providing customer service to their large enterprise customers, and was the first cloud deployment within a traditional IT managed landscape. The plan was to release a minimum viable product (MVP) within a timeline of six months and follow a phased approach for their users to adopt the new solution smoothly and without too many challenges.

Although the implementation team ensured that the scope was aligned with business priorities and clear project goals were agreed upon, no clear processes were defined for the following key aspects of the project:

- Realistic timelines for the activities planned within the engagement
- Understanding of technical and business complexity
- Well-defined project organization structure
- Assignment of adequate and qualified resources
- Effective project updates for the steering group
- Full understanding of the product's out-of-the-box capabilities, thereby avoiding unachievable product requirements

As the project began, complexities surfaced early in the cycle. However, the team didn't revisit and realign their activities. This resulted in the following impacts:

- Poor quality of deliverables
- Mismatch in customer versus partner understanding of requirements
- High number of defects identified during initial testing cycles
- Incomplete implementation of requirements due to lack of skilled resources on the project
- A continuously shifting end date for final go live, resulting in a delay of 6–8 months
- A complete lack of trust between the customer and partner

After several discussions between customer and partner stakeholders and a high impact on cost and morale, the team agreed to clearly define a project organization structure and an approach to continuously monitor and manage the overall project. The following activities were incorporated as project governance processes were defined:

- Considering the new technology, training needs for both the customer's business and IT teams were identified so they could understand both the SaaS world and Dynamics 365 product capabilities.
- An architecture board was established that was responsible for diligently reviewing architectural decisions coupled with the gap analysis. For any gaps identified, this board provided input to the change control board to ensure that a change management approach was followed without any further impact on timelines.
- Both industry and product architects were assigned to the project to avoid any further lack of domain understanding and perform a clear fit gap analysis.
- The steering committee was empowered by the customer's senior management to take the relevant and necessary decisions through the project.
- A key challenge that impacted the deliverable quality was that several activities were planned almost parallel to each other and were to be done by the same project team. As part of the project reorganization, activities such as performance testing and vulnerabilities testing were outsourced. This allowed the existing team to stay focused on their core functional scope.

As the project team implemented these various controls and processes, they were able to redefine their project timelines and have now gone live within that timeline. This has led them to ensure that they can apply and tailor these learnings to other projects to avoid similar high-cost impacts.

In conclusion, project governance must not be thought of as an afterthought. It must be set up from the beginning to work as a flexible backbone for the entire project.

As illustrated by this and other case studies, project governance is the most critical factor that entails all the key elements to make a project successful.