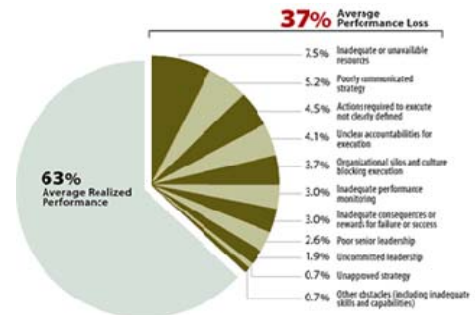


Mend the Business & Technology Relationship

Companies with a healthy, spirited relationship between business operations and the IT organization are few and far between. Instead, this critical relationship is typically callused from years of misaligned expectations, poor communications, delivery misses, technology failures, and an endless list of petty conflicts. The sea of blame is everywhere with no port in the storm. Now more than ever, a new and productive relationship could be invaluable to the company's survival and future prosperity.

Reductions in operating and capital spending are forcing enterprise to reevaluate years of mediocre and neglected solution investments. Platforms and packages sit dormant or with constrained capabilities. However, from the ashes of disaster may come the roses of success. Potential to revive viable solutions and realize the business value originally envisioned from these efforts still exists. Recent analysis has shown that 60% of project failures lie not within the technology or solution but rather in the planning and execution of these efforts. The unfortunate truth is that many of the underlying issues are rooted in the dysfunctional relationship between business and IT.



"Companies typically realize only about 60% of their strategies' potential value because of defects and breakdowns in planning and execution."

Source: Oberlin and Associates from Harvard Business Review, "Turning Great Strategies into Great Performance," July/Aug 2005

The good news is that the entire problem is within the company's control and can be addressed immediately with minimal dollar investment. In the majority of failed or underperforming change programs, the capital expense has already been borne and any effort to improve the working relationship between operations and IT could bring valuable results rather quickly. A few simple steps can make a sizable difference.

Focus on Building Relationships

Unfortunately, we too often fall victim to our own neuroses. We are unable to rise above our individual motivations, respect the perspective of others, and address the true impediments to the desired outcome. This occurs repeatedly in projects that demand continuous response to an evolving set of realities. These realities include new business ideas, evolving solution expectations, technology limitations, schedule and cost trade-offs, and the list goes on. To navigate these constant challenges is hard work. Each side believes the others' expectations are unreasonable, and petty matters begin to surface in the face of adversity. These situations too often establish the divide between business and IT.

A healthy relationship is essential to navigating successfully through these potential setbacks. As with any meaningful relationship, to build and sustain requires patience and concerted effort. A revisit of fundamentals may help the re-building process:

- Facilitate team events and interactions outside of the workplace to foster a deeper bond and respect across team boundaries
- Maintain constant focus on mutual goals when conversations drift to non-productive dialogue
- Operate with integrity and transparency at all times; individuals most often respond in kind, and trust is the most important cornerstone in the relationship.

Solidify Understanding of the Business Goals

Every member of the team, both business and IT, must have command of the business goals and how their individual efforts help to achieve these goals. Even the most junior resources will have repeated opportunity to contribute to or detract from desired business results. These are typically small, unseen matters that may over time manifest in very positive or often negative ways. Individuals are most effective and successful when properly empowered and informed. Knowing their ability to contribute to a tangible business benefit will greatly enhance performance, foster innovation, and increase probabilities for successful outcomes.

Develop and Communicate an IT Vision and Roadmap

Experience indicates less than 25% of organizations have an IT Vision and Roadmap documented and shared across the organization. The Vision provides the target end state supporting the business needs and the Roadmap outlines the sequence of initiatives required to achieve the Vision over a period of time. The Roadmap must be a living document. It provides the basis for continuous prioritization of business needs and shows how the corresponding solutions contribute to the technology vision. It must be artfully concise in articulating business benefits with each significant step. The business will quickly become champions, or at least much less resistant, once they better understand the vision, plan, and expected benefits.

Manage the Roadmap

How many Vision or Roadmap binders are sitting on the bookshelf? How much did the company spend to develop them? There is significant difference between a good and bad Roadmap and its value to the organization. However, too often even the good ones fail to stay relevant much beyond the initial printouts. The reason is lack of integration into the operating processes that cause these roadmaps to remain living documents and useful tools for ongoing management. The most logical placement is in the front-door or demand management processes gating the approval of new efforts, thus creating awareness of alignment with the Vision. Without these documents and processes, there is no basis for the Business & IT Leaders to find natural alignment, and conflict inevitably arises.

Stay Focused on Results & Make Tough Decisions

Success heals many wounds and strengthens bonds that survive long periods of time. Results may not always match original expectations but will feed a healthy cycle of continuous improvement and productive relationships. Business and IT Leaders must strive to make the periodic tough choices to ensure measureable business value is always the yardstick, as opposed to features, functions, aimless innovation, or schedule. Once we look beyond outer layers scarred from previous conflicts, teams may not always agree on the exact same path, but everyone wants to be part of a success.