True technology-enabled change

Forget about the technology—at least for now

When thinking about technology-enabled change one perhaps thinks first of IT solutions, the software that is, and the infrastructure that is needed to enable the change.

Those areas are comprehensively documented by the IT vendors selling their solutions, and there is never a shortage of products covering an enormous range of business processes, whatever the industry sector.

This article, which is the first in a series, will not talk about technology, but instead will present some thoughts, which, in my view, are more important to the success of a technology enabled change.

I say more important because in my experience, if we do not get these fundamentals right, the best software, and the best project team working with state of the art infrastructure is still unlikely to deliver a successful technology-enabled change.

Four factors for success

Of course technology enabled change can mean many things to different audiences. The focus of this and future pieces will be from a business and software solution perspective.

I will write on 4 topics over the coming months. I expect your immediate reaction to these will be, “well of course we address these”. But, I would challenge you to question yourself on how well you do.

1. understand your business requirements
2. understand your organisations capacity for change
3. understand your business environment
4. understand your solution selection process and governance

The first topic I will address is “understand your business requirements”.
An opening caveat: To really address this topic I think it would take a book to cover all the possible scenarios and options and reasons and rationale statements and arguments. I am putting forward a few just to demonstrate by example the situations that might exist. So please read this in that context. Also, where I use the term project it may also mean programme, all subject to the scale of the technology enabled change.

The real requirements

What is the key driver for your technology-enabled project? Is it that your existing system has reached end of life, is unsupported by the vendor, does not have the capacity to deliver the management information, let alone in a timeframe you need it to, to make business decisions? Is your organisation reacting to a merger or acquisition where the various Information Technology systems are not compatible? These and so many more reasons could be drivers for technology enabled change.

It is actually quite easy to justify the change based on these and many other scenarios. But, is that how you go about understanding your business requirements? That is, the requirement to embark on a technology enabled change.

But you told me to do it

In many cases what seems to be a very soundly stated reason for change is no more than a leader saying we need to do it.

Well that is excellent if you have excellent leaders but what if the leader is following a fad, following something they read in a journal, following their best friend’s advice (a friend who happens to be a VP of a software company), following what they did at their last organisation, or following an instinct for just one stream of the business?

Or, they may be supporting a project because a business department head or IT team have said a change is needed because of the reasons I just noted.
**1. Governance**

Have a formal and cross-organisation body with the appropriate oversight, governance and mandate to review any major technology enabled change proposal. Have that body meet regularly and put governance in place that will ensure all key leaders fully understand the direction of the business and can therefore decide what technology-enabled change will be required to meet that business direction.

Let me put it, albeit simplistically, this way. Which is the correct approach to handling technology enabled change?

Scenario 1. The business is going in direction “abc”, for reasons “rst” with planned outcome of “xyz”. A technology enabled change is required.

Scenario 2. The existing IT system is “x” years old, has been unsupported by the vendor for “y” years, the infrastructure is also getting to end of life, we need a new system. Again, a technology enabled change is required.

I predict most readers will chose Scenario 1 when reading this. But is that how it happens in real life?

**2. Prioritisation**

Has the cross-organisation body prioritised all major technology-enabled change programs for a given period? “Major” may be qualified by capital or operating expenditure, by reach and impact to the organisation’s staff or, for example, by expected duration.

Again, for a simplistic scenario. Two technology enabled change programs are proposed:

Scenario 1. The project proposal passed the ROI hurdle. It is expected to take 12 months to deliver. The delivery timeframe fits the business cycle. The business itself and the business climate are expected to be stable during that period.

Scenario 2. The program far exceeds the ROI hurdle and with a very high confidence to decrease costs. The program is expected to impact a large percentage of staff and the expected duration is 2 and half years, although you know from empirical evidence that these programs consistently overrun time and budget. And, your existing technology platform, while stable right now, is past its use by date. In other words, it is not modern.

Again Scenario 1 is the more likely choice if one had to choose only one of the two.

But, do you have the governance to ensure the best decision is made? Do you have the mindset across the business to ensure that this thinking and assessment actually takes place? Or, do you perhaps have a mindset of “this is my budget and I will spend it on my project?”
3. Target Operating Model

Your proposed technology enabled change program will impact three of your major business processes and 20% of your staff. It is a fundamental business change. It is required to replace “past their use by date” systems and introduces new concepts, models of working and relationships with customers and suppliers.

How do you decide your business requirements?

Two simplistic scenarios are again presented.

Scenario 1. You established a qualified team, which may include external experts, to define an operating model based on a set of principles and best practice ways of working. This could include, for example, establishing design principles, process vision, and governance and policy statements. It is likely to also address drivers for the change and the people implications.

Scenario 2. You document a detailed analysis of every functional requirement you have in your existing business process and systems. You complete a very time consuming and resource heavy functional requirement analysis with “must have” and “nice to have” assessments, and perhaps also an “As is” “To be” analysis.

If you selected scenario 2 you went with the norm and the way most organisation I have seen go about preparing business requirements. This approach can end up meaning a re-implementation of your old ways of working but with a new solution and most likely a new solution for which you will require many customisations and enhancements if you are to ‘tick the box’ for all your ‘must have’ functional requirements.

Scenario 1 would not on its own, in my view, give a truly holistic understanding of the business requirements but it would be a fundamental step in the right direction. Even more so if the design principles and process vision were aligned to the best practices which are already embedded in a future technology solution, and, an appropriately scaled “As is” and “To be” analysis is used during the implementation.

In summary, to understand your business requirements requires an organisation wide view with appropriate governance, a prioritisation perspective well defined and agreed operating model principles.

However, even before embarking on a technology enabled change there is, in my view, another fundamental question that needs to be assessed, answered and agreed. In a sense it too is a business requirement. It is this.

Do you understand your organisation’s capacity for change?

The next article in this series will address that topic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael has delivered technology-enabled change many times in his career. The notes above his hard-earned lessons.

He also has over 25 years experience in leadership roles in prominent customer and vendor organizations working in the UK, Canada, Australia, South Korea and Hong Kong in the Airline, Banking, and Telecommunications sectors.

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