

A METHODOLOGY IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS!

“You get an ology, you’re a scientist”, a famous quote from a 1980s BT advert that sees Maureen Lipman re-assuring her grandson that despite his poor exam results his “ology” means he’s a scientist. So, what of our methodologies in today’s challenging delivery environment? Can they guarantee success?

Organisations invest heavily in their methodologies and supporting governance to help deliver programmes successfully, but having all of that means little if the programme isn’t properly established and the team work to deliver value, rather than simply following the methodology rulebook. To deliver well, a programme needs the right focus on outcomes and value, with an involved and committed sponsor community, and a team willing and able to assess its direction and adapt its approach to suit a changing environment.

IT’S MORE THAN JUST “AGILE VS WATERFALL”

Much is made today about the virtues of Agile delivery methods – its ability to maintain value focus and to “free-up” teams from the burden of serial Waterfall approaches. Similarly, Waterfall is often maligned as a “heads-down” delivery march where the outcome can only be as good as the upfront thinking during the requirements phase, often months or even years earlier. Both are over-simplifications, but what matters are a small number of key principles that transcend the particular approach which is adopted...

MAINTAIN THE FOCUS ON OUTCOME

This focus is often forgotten as programmes gain a life of their own – both Agile and Waterfall, often in the form of a contract with a Systems Integrator that can never truly reflect how the future will pan out. The team can all too easily become task (or contract) focused and start to lose the bigger picture rationale for what they are trying to achieve.

Someone in the team (whether an Agile Product Owner or Waterfall lead Subject Matter Expert) needs to have that overarching accountability and wake up every morning to assess: are we delivering the best outcome and what could change to make it better?

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PLAN AND MAINTAIN THE WIDER INPUTS

SMEs or Product Owners are experts in their field, but they don't know everything, nor do they always carry the full, unequivocal support of the wider business. Any Product Owner or SME worth their salt should be continuously networking with their business colleagues to get additional and up-to-date inputs, to build consensus and (at times) to take a clear position where differences occur. Rather than just accommodating this, delivery methodologies need to actively plan for it, even where it might seem that change or uncertainty is a hindrance.

BE ADAPTIVE

The team owe it to their sponsor to be able to evolve and adapt to meet new priorities and expected results. Even in Waterfall, locking requirements in aspic and fearing anything that might change them is actually acceptance that the team are not able to adapt and fine tune effectively. Similarly, wider governance processes need to work with that dynamic rather than see change as a sign of a fundamental problem. Entrusting our teams to adapt is a critical success factor in any programme.

Despite the BT advert, "ologies" are not just science. Science gives the solidity and underpinnings, but it's artistry, through years of experience and challenging the norms, that delivers true excellence. Ensuring that delivery focuses on outcome, value and maintaining flexibility when it matters is more about knowing when the methodology is constraining you than following it rigidly step by step.

DO YOU NEED CHANGE EXPERTISE?

Project One's team of change experts have first-hand experience of programmes of all sizes, types and delivery approaches. Working with customers and their partners, we seek to define and adapt methodologies to give the right balance between value focus, adaptability and delivery confidence.

If you'd like to discuss this further, please email:

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