



DECIDING ON YOUR NEXT PROJECTS

by Jean-François Desroches

How do you set about determining the next projects you will undertake?

One of the first steps is to draw up a list of potential projects that you could embark on. So here is a list of questions to help you make choices.

Will projects that are currently underway lead to follow-up projects?

Are any of your systems nearing the end of their life cycle?

Are any new legal obligations looming that your organization will have to comply with?

Are there changes in organizational structures ahead that will require new systems to be introduced?

Is your company about to acquire a new business or sell off one of its areas of activity?

Are you obliged to make changes to your processes and information systems to comply with a new accounting standard or a new industry standard?

Are there projects which, even when completed, have failed to deliver all the expected functionalities?

Are there any business processes that are causing you performance problems, or for which you have major issues to resolve?

Does your company's business strategy require your organization to install new systems so that you can deliver your portion of the strategy concerned?

What projects in other areas of the company will impact your organization? Do you have to deliver prerequisites for some of these projects? Conversely, must some of these projects deliver prerequisites to you?

Once you have drawn up a list of potential projects, you will need to prepare a business file for each project for which you intend to submit an application for funding. Each of your business files must include a cost evaluation; in this regard, note that it is better to present a range of potential costs rather than a single amount, because the estimate you currently have in hand is still preliminary and high-level. You must also set out all the benefits that each project will bring, whether financial, strategic, quantitative or qualitative, or whether they involve cost reductions and avoidance. Because a presentation of the proposed solutions must be included

in each file, it would be wise to ascertain the level of maturity and robustness of the solutions considered.

Your business files will be updated as each project progresses and will enable you to guide the major decisions you will have to take in the course of project completion. It is important to clearly understand your company's process for prioritizing and allocating funding, since this will allow you to optimize the way you present your files. The more profitable your projects are, and the more in line with corporate strategy they are, the better their chances of being selected by senior management.

When preparing your business file, you will have to meet with experts in your area of business; find out about current best practices in your industry and meet with software vendors who offer potential solutions.

It is wise to draw up a plan of the human resources required by each of the projects you develop. This will help you determine whether your organization is able to supply all the expertise required and to decide what expertise will come from outside. Some expertise that is particular to your company cannot be acquired on the market and must therefore come from your personnel. This is often the ultimate constraint that will dictate the speed at which your project portfolio can be delivered.

It is not uncommon to find projects competing for rarer resources inside the company, a situation that requires adjudication. In many organizations, the adjudication process is not done in a systematic manner and is subject to political factors, which do not always lead to the best decisions.

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