



Initiative for
Collaborative Government

Partnering for mission results

Critical Success Factors for Large, Complex Information Technology Projects

May 2010

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The CGI Initiative for Collaborative Government is a joint public-policy project of CGI in partnership with leading academic institutions. Launched in January 2008, the initiative's mission is to analyze models of government's collaboration with the private and nonprofit sectors in order to identify best practices in using collaboration to achieve mission results.

Government today partners with the private and nonprofit sectors to accomplish a broad range of mission-related and administrative functions. The question is not whether collaboration will occur, but rather how agencies will collaborate most effectively while retaining strategic alignment, control, and accountability. The CGI Initiative for Collaborative Government is focused on helping government answer this challenge.

The CGI Initiative publishes reports with academic partners including George Mason University, the founding partner with CGI; the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies; and the University of Maryland Center for Public Policy and Private Enterprise. The CGI Initiative also conducts webinars, produces videos, sponsors events and publishes an online newsletter. A full listing of the CGI Initiative's 2010 agenda, access to reports, videos, and executive summaries of seminar discussions, as well as registration for webinars and subscriptions to *Collaborative Government Today* are available at [**www.collaborativegov.org**](http://www.collaborativegov.org).

To find out more about the initiative:
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Major information technology projects involve far more than just technology. They are, first and foremost, major change management initiatives that alter the way an organization operates, including what work it performs, by whom, where and using what processes. They also provide a mechanism for linking data for the first time – including data from sources outside the major IT initiative – to create new information the organization can use to manage operations. Thus, these projects affect and involve organizations beyond the project management office and often beyond the organization that initiated them.

Therefore, to ensure the success of large, complex, high-budget IT modernization initiatives, organizations must make sure to address a set of key issues in the strategic and tactical project plans and as the organization implements the IT solution. These critical success factors are:

1. Ensuring senior-level executive support (secretary and subcabinet/administrator)

This ensures the organization can:

- Bring together incremental pieces of a project or other projects to craft a holistic strategic management vision for the organization.
- Manage the cultural environment within the organization to ensure needed assistance is provided to the project.
- Address project implementation issues across organizational units.
- Focus resources to address unexpected issues when they arise.
- Empower the project managers so they will be successful.

2. Ensuring senior management level involvement/commitment/expertise

With it, the organization can:

- Get the best and most strategic functional people committed to the project for requirements or implementation.
- Communicate effectively throughout the organization as the project progresses.
- Actively manage organizational/business change in units outside the project office.

3. Instituting and maintaining a strong governance structure

- Senior leadership commitment demonstrates how important the project is to the organization and ensures the proper levels of oversight and cooperation.
- Executive Oversight Committees need to meet frequently, be conversant about the project and be ready to address issues presented by the PM or Executive Sponsor.
- The leadership must be clear about the goals of the project, and these goals must remain consistent and be continuously communicated throughout the project.
- Roles, responsibilities and decision rights must be clear.
- Consider creating advisory boards (internal and external to government) for key projects.

4. Providing sufficient project management expertise and empowerment

- Major projects call for strong project managers with demonstrated project management expertise and a track record of success.
- Project managers need the support of strong project sponsors.
- The project manager must have authority to act to deliver the project.
- IT projects depend on effectively managing people and events – putting your best technical person, who lacks the skills needed to manage people and events, in charge of a project will result in problems for the project.
- Major IT projects are large management and governance tasks, not technical tasks. Although the technical aspects of a project are important, having the best technical solution or people will not guarantee success. The people in charge must be skilled managers of people, events and culture and must know the technology or have trusted advisers or contractors who can counsel them.

5. Ensuring requirements are adequately defined and avoiding scope creep

- Leaders must be clear about the goals of the project and limit them to an achievable number. Three improvement goals can be achieved in a relatively short period of time; 60-70 goals for multiple constituencies cannot.
- A core group of forward-looking functional agency experts should be devoted to developing the project requirements. Functional experts

should not be asked to continue conducting regular operations in addition to working on a large, complex IT project.

- The core requirements development group might need additional contractor expertise to ensure that the requirements take into consideration emerging technologies and best practices in the functional area of the operations, system or delivery.
- Business process reengineering must be addressed and business standards across the organization must be established along with the IT effort.
- If the project office is at the department level, field-level requirements must be addressed.
- Use caution when attempting to fit new requirements into the implementation plan for a complex IT project. Doing so can cause delay and increase costs. Once a project is launched, be ready to deal with others in the agency who see the utility of the project and seek to use the contract for their automation needs or to deal with a new governmentwide issue or mandate.
- Customization of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products should not be allowed except in the unusual circumstance where the standard software cannot address a legitimate government requirement.
- Any scope changes or requests for COTS customization should be vigorously challenged. The organization requesting the change should be required to justify the request and explain the cost/benefit/return on investment of meeting it.
- Be sure to leave open “back doors” in new software so you can add on later or link up other systems or different phases of the project.

6. Pairing a “big vision” with incremental implementation

- A strategic, conceptual framework for operations is necessary in order to make the improvements to streamline operations and realize efficiencies and cost savings that must occur for the project to succeed.
- It is equally important to fund and implement prioritized project components over time with demonstrated success.



Patricia Healy

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Patricia Healy is an Executive Consultant with CGI and former Deputy Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Agriculture, having retired in January 2008. She became the Deputy CFO of USDA in October 1999, serving as second in command for financial management activities of more than 100,000 employees in the department, and for direct

management of 1,300 employees in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer in Washington and the National Finance Center in New Orleans. As full deputy under a Senate Confirmed Presidential Appointee, she also was acting CFO of USDA for three years during the transition to the Bush administration and when the political CFOs resigned. Her duties involved accounting and reporting responsibilities for one of the most complex departments in the government with more than \$120 billion in program funds, one-third of all federal non-tax debt and \$95 billion in annual outlays.

Before her move to USDA, Healy served as the National Director for the Systems and Accounting Standards Division at the Internal Revenue Service, reporting to the CFO. Healy successfully implemented enterprisewide, comprehensive financial management systems at both USDA and the IRS.

In 2003, Healy received the Meritorious Presidential Rank award. She was elected a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration in 2005 and works with the Partnership for Public Service as a strategic adviser to Government Executives (CFO SAGE). In 2006, she was awarded the Donald L. Scantlebury Memorial award by OMB, GAO and OPM, for exceptional and sustained leadership in financial management at USDA and in the federal government.

Healy has an MBA from the University of Maryland, a Master's degree in library science from the University of Michigan, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Ohio State University.

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