

Executive Sponsor Considerations for Enterprise Cloud Adoption

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Abstract

As enterprise-level companies consider cloud strategies aligned to meeting corporate growth and performance objectives, executive sponsors have myriad considerations to undertake. Such considerations may include:

- Cloud platform selection
- Project Portfolio strategy
- Implementation, Change and Risk Tolerance
- IT and Business Team Synergies

This paper will explore the above considerations as executive level project sponsorship is considered vital to successful disruption of IT-norms within the enterprise in favor of value-add and highly nimble cloud solutions whose aim is to enhance business velocity and enterprise-level pivots towards high-growth opportunities.

Understanding the Role of the Sponsor

Enterprise cloud adoption is complex. Strong executive sponsorship is 'vital' when organizations make the decision to go-forward with organization-wide deployments of cloud platforms or applications whose intent is to add value and drive organizational collaboration and velocity. The role of the executive sponsor within the enterprise is therefore a critical component to successful enterprise adoption of leading edge cloud technologies and the complexity of the role must not be discounted.

The role of the executive sponsor is critical not only during the implementation of such technologies but well prior to implementation as platform selection and project portfolio strategies prior to project-level implementation are vital. The role of the sponsor is broad-based and provides a 'single executive' level leadership position with a chief objective of 'impediment removal'. This objective may involve playing a crucial role in providing a bridge between the technical complexities of implementation often involving deep Information Technology team alignment while in tandem playing the role as 'primary business objective' sponsor for internal and external stakeholders whose sole aim is to realize the value of the very technologies being implemented. The sponsor's role is crucial in ensuring the systems for accountability are in place within the organization as well as externally inclusive of system integrators and service providers who may play a crucial role in project portfolio execution. Thus, the executive sponsor of a cloud implementation portfolio is one of the most crucial roles in today's enterprise eco-system.

Cloud Platform Selection

Well prior to the executive sponsor implementation role, sponsors play a critical position when it comes to cloud platform selection. Leveraging a strong understanding of an internal organization's information technology eco-system history, a strong executive sponsor will seek to understand not only the opportunities with cloud adoption but will seek to understand fully the potential impediments that pertain to moving an organization forward in a way that embraces cloud platform benefits while not being negatively disruptive to existing state business processes integral to a company's revenue trajectory. This artful nuance is a skill derived by strong executive sponsors that include the ability to politically formulate a go forward cloud adoption strategy while understanding the realities of implementation complexity in parallel to those aims.

Cloud platform selection is critical to the enterprise. Involvement of executive sponsors in this pre-implementation phase is therefore vital to ensuring that downstream implementation of such technologies results in positive outcomes for the firm. Companies utilize varied approaches to cloud platform selection. Research of upper-right quadrant best of breed platforms and applications is a viable starting point for the enterprise when considering wall-to-wall cloud technologies. Once an understanding is reached in terms of viable options for the enterprise whether they are considering ERP platforms, CRM solutions such as Salesforce.com, collaboration and content management platforms such as BOX.COM, or other cloud and mobile applications, other considerations then are taken into account such as organizational scale, budgetary considerations for Software as a Service (SaaS) licenses, implementation, training and adoption mechanisms and prior investments the organization may have made in such technologies tied to an overall cloud and mobile technology roadmap.

Many organizations will short list a set of solution options for a viable cloud technology direction and using a scorecard will validate the most appropriate fit in terms of final selection. Sponsors may consider all of these factors inclusive of the benefits to be derived from cloud platform sales executives, engineering teams and systems integrators whose insight as to market trajectory, scalability, cost-to-value, implementation complexity and benchmarks against other industry vertical leaders are all critical considerations to be undertaken when making final cloud and mobile application decisions for the enterprise.

Involvement of IT and Business Leaders from various business units early in this selection phase will enhance the ability of the enterprise and associated executive sponsors with achieving the buy-in and internal support that will be required during implementation where adoption of such new technologies becomes paramount to organizational success.

Thus, an executive sponsor's ability to engage early in this phase is deemed to be viable and a critical consideration for enterprise CIO's and executive leadership teams.

Project Portfolio Strategy

As company's move towards cloud platform selection tied to organizational IT infrastructure roadmaps, the topic of project portfolio strategy becomes paramount. In this consideration, sponsors will undertake a significant responsibility in terms of evaluating other and often competing project activity within the enterprise that may require executive attention, budget allocation, resource expenditure, integrator support and project synchronization to support the appropriate delivery cadence of new technology releases for the business.

Thus, the issue of 'timing' becomes critical when evaluating the approach of overseeing a myriad of strategic project engagements whose sequencing in terms of release management, integration and business value-add are absolutely critical. Resource allocation in support of the sponsor is therefore quite important to ensuring that a broad-based view of all active project engagements across the enterprise and their associated intersection points are considered in order to reduce contention, resource over-allocation, and to enhance the ability of the selected cloud platform applications to achieve the intended business value. This moves the sponsor from a roadmap development role to a direct implementation consideration and is a natural and vital next step to maturation of the executive sponsor role within the enterprise.

Implementation, Change and Risk Tolerance

Executive Sponsors naturally mature from a role as 'influencer' during portfolio selection phases into a role as 'implementer in chief' during project delivery cycles across the portfolio. This is where the proverbial rubber meets the road in terms of executive sponsor success as it's directly tied to the ability of the sponsor to build the necessary internal and external coalitions needed to ensure successful project delivery to the enterprise. During this vital implementation phase, the strongest sponsors will have a clearly defined outline of critical success factors to be considered when implementing cloud-based solutions for the organization.

These success factors may include schedule performance, budget integrity, application adoption measurements by business users, change management performance and successful adherence to success criteria for both IT and Business Units as key stakeholders in the outcomes of the technology implementation. In this role, the sponsor maintains a broad level of responsibility in ensuring strong execution while also realizing that in-flight projects are difficult and that tradeoffs in terms of implementation course correction will be required and will demand the executive sponsor's stewardship during such moments of critical decision making. A spirit of transparency and trade-off analysis protocols will ensure

the sponsor is not only able to quickly mitigate impediments, but is sufficiently empowered in a leadership capacity to drive team morale and business success attainment.

Furthermore, organizations have varying degrees of risk tolerance often defined by specific industry verticals or legal and/or compliance requirements. Such levels of risk tolerance for in-flight projects must be fully understood during project implementation planning workshops to ensure decisive decision making by sponsors.

IT and Business Team Synergies

Much has been written about the convergence of IT and Business. With rapid deployable cloud platform applications inherent in today's enterprise eco-system, it is absolutely vital that executive sponsors be viewed as the bridge between business unit needs and Information Technology best practices. Regardless of where cloud implementation budgets may reside, executive sponsors who are most adept at aligning to CIO-level IT objectives in combination with the aims of sales, marketing, operations and business unit leadership will find the most success in their role as executive sponsors.

While it is understood that business units will wish to derive the value from the newly deployed cloud or mobile solutions, it must also be understood that such applications and platforms must be fully exploited and implemented with a maturity model pursuant to IT team objectives in the areas of application ownership, post implementation support, training, enhancement release strategies and other post-implementation considerations often deemed as critical to IT leadership.

With this set of objectives in mind, the executive sponsor role is absolutely critical to an enterprise's successful selection, implementation and adoption of leading edge cloud and mobile technologies. The Executive Sponsor role may in fact be the most vital role within the walls of an enterprise whose aims is to select, implement, adopt and leverage the power of cloud technologies and mobile applications.

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