

WHEN TECHNOLOGY HURTS INNOVATION

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The rapid pace of technology development brings an increasing array of new solutions for every process and activity government employees engage in. While each new solution touts significant ROI of increased revenues, decreased costs, and improved efficiency, those goals may rarely result in quantifiable outcomes.

Somewhere within the grey area between launching a new technology to successfully integrating it into your organization lies a graveyard of failed technology implementations. This begs the question, does there come a point where more technology can, no matter how slick, hurt your organization?

The push to implement and upgrade antiquated processes with modern solutions will not stop, but the rate at which these new systems are failing to achieve their desired outcomes demands a better examination of how to move forward. In a survey by IAG Consulting, 68% of respondents found that their technology implementations failed to meet the business need for which they were acquired – meaning that even successfully implemented solutions often do not adequately address the problem they were meant to solve.

To help stay out of the implementation graveyard, here are common pitfalls to avoid and best practices to follow for a successful technology implementation.



Challenges

#1 Too Much Too Fast

Probably the most common mistake is when implementation outpaces the development of internal business practices and policies. Most likely, any new system implementation will demand adapting or completely revamping current policies and procedures. Often, it is expected that new technology will immediately create a more efficient version of pre-existing systems. However, that attitude can cripple the potential value of implementing something new as it does not acknowledge building internal capacity for use of the technology.

#2 The Inspired (and Lonely) Champion

New and exciting ideas always have a champion who can come from any level of an organization. Whether a City Manager or an

Analyst, someone sees the potential a new system can have to transform a process – and they begin to advocate for it. Unfortunately, this can often lead to jumping the gun on a technology for which there is no organizational buy-in.

#3 IT Gridlock

When it comes to technology implementations, all roads lead to IT and that road can quickly turn into gridlock. Not understanding how your project fits into the overall IT schedule can bring the most enthusiastic project to a halt. Understanding the true scope of the project's impact on IT can also be a major factor. Many new technologies are cloud-based and do not require the heavy IT involvement of yesteryear. Clearly communicating staff impacts can help set expectations and provide a more realistic implementation timeline.

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Best Practices

#1 Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

Project implementation challenges are often avoidable with the right planning and preparation. Here are three things to consider during your preparation stage:

- Thoroughly review current business processes and legacy systems. Remember, it's not about taking an old system and creating new technology around it as we can't use the same methods we used before and expect different results. Instead, it is important to have a clear understanding and vision for how internal policies and legacy systems will be transformed by the technology solution.
- Clearly define system needs and desired performance outcomes. What are your stakeholders' expected outcomes of this implementation? It may sound obvious but having extremely clear outcomes can help determine the right vendor or solution "fit" for your organization. Often, vendors will tout their ROI or outcomes, but it's critical to ensure that these outcomes are truly aligned with what your organization seeks to achieve.
- Realistically assess your staff capacity and competency. No amount of preparation will overcome an overwhelmed staff unable to navigate new systems. Cataloging the systems each person is currently managing can help determine whether or not you should wait to implement another new system.

#2 Over-communicate During Launch

Clear communication among your staff, leadership, and the vendor is vitally important to your implementation process. Consider the following during your implementation launch:

- Set very clear milestones at the beginning of the project, both internally and for the vendor, to ensure your project stays on track.
- Communicate the unique impacts to each stakeholder. Depending on how complex the rollout, you may want to provide detailed deliverables for different roles within your organization. For instance, there could be very specific milestones that IT needs to achieve that would prevent the project from progressing until completed. Also ensure you have appropriate leadership support for your implementation. Obtaining a publicity email from management at the outset to emphasize the importance and authority behind the transition helps to strengthen organizational support for the effort.
- Invest in adequate training – it's a step that is often missed or inadequately addressed. Make sure your end users have the resources to understand how the new technology will impact their current position, how old processes will be completed, and where expectations may need to be adjusted. Investing in training will ensure the momentum created after the launch continues when rolled out to the end users.

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Best Practices In Action

The City of Fort Collins recently sought to address their own technological challenge using many of the preceding principles. Specifically, the City sought to build a comprehensive grant management system to strengthen their internal capacity to identify funding opportunities, write competitive applications, and successfully manage their grant awards. The City viewed a compre-

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hensive grant system as an essential tool to help sustain City initiatives by providing additional revenue sources and overseeing compliance with federal, state, and private funding regulations.

Defining Need and Creating Clear Ownership

The City assessed their current capacity and found that they had a fragmented grant system operating inconsistently among departments. The City identified the need to create a position to develop and manage its grant process and invested in the creation of a Grants Development Specialist. The City also sought a tool to assist in developing a comprehensive grant system and took advantage of participating in a pilot project with the Alliance for Innovation and one of its corporate partners to implement a cloud-based grant management tool to identify and pursue funding opportunities.

The City strategically went about implementing this new technology in 3 steps.

1. Clear Ownership – The Grants Development Specialist was charged with managing the pilot.
2. Leadership Support – City leadership was involved in communicating their support for the pilot participation and messaging was sent out city-wide.
3. The vendor provided on-site training for key staff members who became departmental “superusers” and the Grants Development Specialist became the chief City liaison to support their use of the system.

Getting Buy-In

After the first three months of participation, City staff were surveyed as to their use of the new technology to measure staff buy-in. Survey results found that those who used the system found it to be a highly useful tool. As staff became aware of the tool’s capabilities for tracking financial and progress reporting, the new grant platform was identified as a tool to help implement grant projects and report on outcomes.

Once recognized as the grant management solution, the vendor assisted in training additional City department staff on use of the system and the Grants Development Specialist has led the charge in educating City staff as to leadership’s expectation to utilize the tool for the pre-award and post-award grant process.



The Impact

The combined efforts of finding the right technological solution, having a clear process owner, and supportive leadership has helped the City of Fort Collins establish a sustainable new technology. As a result, the City has:

1. expanded its funding opportunities,
2. grown its collaborative focus with community partners, and
3. established a system-wide process of compliance to protect the City’s financial interests.

With the right tool and support to implement and maintain the solution, the establishment of a comprehensive grant management system has helped to advance the City of Fort Collins’ vision to provide exceptional municipal services through operational excellence and a culture of innovation.

To learn more about how your local community can identify relevant grant opportunities, get assistance in writing an application, managing the successful grant award and having confidence in your compliance challenges, click on www.eCivis.com or contact Ryan Baird, Director of Client Services at rbaird@ecivis.com.



eCivis is the leading cloud-based grants management system in the nation for state, local, and tribal governments. Our innovative solutions address both programmatic and fiscal grant funding requirements throughout the grant lifecycle, helping clients easily overcome the challenges and heavy workload that come with finding and managing grants.

For more information about eCivis, visit www.eCivis.com