

Gold Plating Transformation Programmes

How can we reduce the cost of delivery particularly in terms of reducing waste, bureaucracy and the gold plating of solutions?

This article is the first in a series exploring how to reduce the cost of delivery particularly in terms of reducing waste, bureaucracy and the gold plating of solutions. It's based on our observations in finance, banking, insurance, telecoms and utility sectors, and gives some insight into the common trends across those industries.

Step 1: Identifying Gold Plating as it happens

Usually attractive but superfluous work anonymously hits the bottom line of the programme in terms of costs and timescales. It's sometimes difficult to identify, is hard to remedy and often causes further knock on issues with culture: a lack of direction and loss of belief/purpose that often spirals across the programme. People often associate gold plating with extra, undocumented work by software developers but we have seen it delivered within the structure and confines of the programme – documented, tested, reported. It just needs to be recognised as such.



Step 2: Understand the cause

Why does it happen? Reasons include: At best enthusiasm and a keenness to please, at worst greed (I want to be busy/paid), self-importance and political manoeuvring. We often see (1) proof of concepts driven by "lust" for new technology that doesn't have a business case that stacks up; (2) goals that proliferate, diverge and get hijacked (it's not just the goal that needs to be clear – it needs to be interpreted in a consistent way); (3) conflicting agendas, competing agendas and scope creep (sometimes designed to kill off the project).

Step 3: Learn and avoid

"Just enough is just enough" (MVP has its merits!) with good comprehension of the aims of the programme and simple questioning you can avoid the situation. Test the requirements and ask yourself are they truly necessary for the programme success. Beware the product centric drivers (hard to pin back to the business case). And adopt "Islands of stability" and plan early prizes (evolution not transformation). The key element is to build intelligence into project initiation and adopt "value based planning" from the outset. More of this in later articles.



Step 4: Fix is difficult (Go to Step 3)

If you've discovered gold plating you will have to take really decisive action to recover, usually against a significant wall of emotional investment. Getting the softer elements of the fix are often overlooked and won't eradicate the problem. Rebuilding a truly common view of what's important for the programme can be impossible without a significant "reset". Best avoided.

We'll issue further articles on bureaucracy and measurement over next couple of weeks. And are planning further discussion at the March Intelligent Projects Forum.

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