Right Thing - Right Time - Right Way

Building an achievable Portfolio Roadmap based on effective governance decisions, line of sight, and resource capacity.

By Tamara Pomerantz

Every organization seeks to select projects that provide value – the **right thing**. However, often value achievement is limited because projects collide or conflict, and resource capacity is constrained – it wasn't the **right time**.

More than half of initiatives and projects take too long, going well past estimated timeframes and failing to deliver expected value.

59% of initiatives take too long to complete, and **52%** of initiatives take too long to realize value.

- Gartner 2023 CIO Agenda report

More than **50%** of project overages result from projects starting when resources are not available, conflicting with other projects, or lacking the scope to address the actual problem and achieve the desired outcome.

- Findings from 2020 Cerner write off data

These struggles are often related to challenges with:

- Articulating problems or business needs
- Gathering data to understand resource capacity and competing priorities
- Processing information to properly scope and estimate work
- Decision-making for selecting the right initiatives and projects to solve the problems
- Delivering expected value on time

Why be concerned?

When there is a lack of coordination between the right thing and the right time, projects often fail – either completing without attaining the value expected or not completing at all. What's even worse, is that the wrong solution is often chosen for the problem.

For organizations to benefit meaningfully from their investments, it is necessary to select solutions that solve problems and support strategy achievement within the capacity of resources while avoiding collisions with other projects. We need to select the **right thing** at the **right time** to implement the **right way**.

Health system practices and approaches often do not support the required coordination, agility, and management needed for selecting many projects, determining when they should be scheduled to start, and what can be run simultaneously within the capacity of their resources for successful implementation and value achievement.

What you can do

To select and deliver the right thing at the right time in the right way, organizations need to have effective and well-organized processes and understand prioritization and ranking.

1. Have **effective** and **well-organized** processes and practices through:
   - Synergized organizational governance decision-making aligned with strategy
   - Coordinated data driven portfolio management
   - Agile and continually developing workforce
   - Efficient daily operating procedures.

   To break the cycle of implementation without value attainment, an organization must come together around common strategic and operational goals with shared standard processes for deciding and governing how the limited resources of people, time and money should be invested. Further, the same strategic and operational objectives that drive investment decisions must also govern the way projects are overseen when implemented to ensure they are delivered the right way and achieve expected benefits; providing a line of sight between strategic goal, decision, delivery, and value achievement.

   Effective data driven portfolio management leads to better awareness and coordination of what an organization is doing, provides information on competing priorities and resource allocation, and increases opportunities for synergies across work. It also tracks project alignment to tactically resolve problems and support the line of sight to strategy.

   A continuously developing workforce ensures teams are structured to be more cross-functional (fusion teams) for greater agility and efficiency; and resources are managed to minimize over allocation and maximize abilities.

   Finally, clear and documented processes for daily operating procedures ensure people understand expectations for how to communicate and deliver. Responsibility, ownership, and accountability cannot be realized if people do not know what is expected.

2. Understand **priority** and **rank**.

   Priority clarifies what is the right thing to do while ranking helps determine when is the right time to do it.

   Priority should be determined based on the organization's strategic and operational measurable goals and problem statements.

Knowing the problem we are trying to solve supports effective communication of what is being requested, and helps confirm the request is made for the right reasons.

Additionally, a well-defined problem statement clarifies expectations for value achievement – value is achieved when the problem is solved or the outlined situation improves. It provides quantifiers for measuring improvement, establishing a reference for defining what success "looks like" through target conditions.

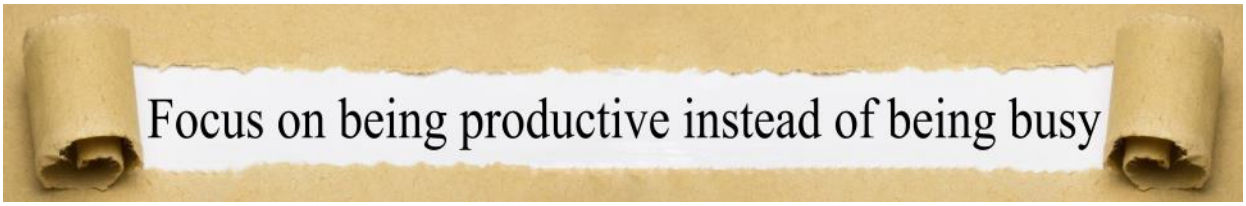
With clear problem statements, organizations can improve planning for what needs to be included in projects, the scope, to deliver a full solution. In turn this helps identify the work effort, timing, and resource expectations needed for successful delivery.

The information from **priority and problem statements helps us identify what the right things are** for the organization. However, just because a requested project is a possible solution does not mean it is the right time for the project. The information needs to be compared to other requests and opportunities through ranking to determine is it the right time.

Ranking helps evaluate if it is the right time for a project by looking across the organization and comparing all priorities competing for resources. This process reviews the ability and availability of limited resources (people, budget, and technology), considers if a live "work around" solution exists that could be applied, and examines if similar projects have already been approved or if something planned will address or change the situation.

Ranking also takes into consideration the Law of Diminishing Returns which says there is a point when increasing input leads to progressively smaller or less successful output, thus diminishing the returned value of the investment. Essentially, ranking recognizes that trying to do more at a given time, even if they are the right things, leads to collision and conflict - resources and focus become spread too thin, delays consistently occur, quality suffers, and time and money are wasted. Therefore, ranking can be used to determine if a project should be denied, not because it is the wrong thing, but because it isn't the right time to do it and should be considered again in the future. Through ranking organizations can achieve a properly balanced and coordinated portfolio roadmap that confirms resource capacity and interdependencies are accounted for and achievement of the objectives is attainable.

Good decision-making that takes into account both priority and ranking supports a portfolio roadmap built on selecting the right projects at the right time.



How you can do it

Effective Operational Governance and Portfolio Management are about selecting the right projects at the right time. While effective product, program and project management is about executing the projects the right way.

Design an organizational governance structure and process around strategy, creating multi-disciplinary operational groups to evaluate requests and determine the right path forward while understanding resource capacity and identifying where to direct critical resources for maximum impact (See MAKE's article "**What's in your operational governance?"**). Further, create accountability by having operational governance oversee delivery implementation with responsibility for result achievement of their selected investments.

Confirm the organization employs portfolio management tactics to support coordinated cohesive approaches through data and an organizational roadmap. At its most effective, portfolio management collects and analyzes data to track competing priorities and monitor resource capacity. Using collected data on scope, resources, audience, and impact, portfolio managers constantly scan for conflicts and collisions, while working to gain synergies.

Establish practices and structure teams to provide effective product/program management that "harmonizes" related projects and functions to control interdependencies, promote and enforce processes, and manage and grow resources. Additionally, utilize project management practices to manage work as well as ensure project metrics based on problem statements are established, tracked, and reported throughout and post project delivery to ensure achievement of goals and value.

Finally, apply intake and project data to understand and improve resource estimates and forecast future resource needs.

What can be realized – one Organization's experience

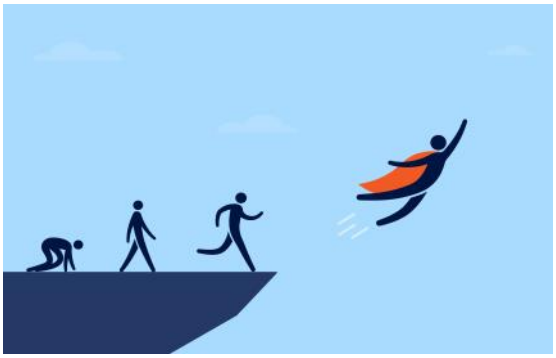
An organization found themselves backlogged with hundreds of projects and requests, with no clear understanding of how to prioritize and address them within the constraints of their resources. The backlog kept growing and active projects kept falling further and further behind as resources were constantly being directed to refocus on different things.

The decision was made to revise the governance process and structure for selecting projects, updating the request intake process, and creating a universal scoring tool that evaluated both priority and ranking to clarify which requests were right for the organization and when requests could be started. The scoring tool required consideration of the problem statement, alignment to strategy, comparison to active and future committed projects, and resource availability. To support this enhanced governance process, the organization also transformed their project management practices to provide data driven portfolio management.

These actions improved organizational awareness of active operational work as well as projects – and the demand of both on resources. Further, these changes established clear evaluation criteria, clarified expectations for making requests, and incentivized properly documenting and capturing data. All of which **enabled better decision making for selecting the right thing at the right time**. Additionally, the organization was able to better forecast resource staffing needs, providing the ability to better target professional development and cross-functional education, and improve hiring and contractor planning. Within one year the organization went from over 500 outstanding "committed" projects and 400 unprocessed requests, to 170 committed projects slotted on a 3-year Roadmap with only 45 unprocessed requests assigned for operational review and decision. Further, the changes improved how the organization was able to focus on and deliver projects – **the right way**.

What you can accomplish

Achieving and sustaining success is dependent on selecting and delivering the right thing at the right time and requires aligned decision making, innovative planning, data driven analytics, and rigor around processes. It also requires constantly assessing processes and making necessary adjustments to continuously improve.



If you have a portfolio roadmap built by selecting the right thing at the right time, you will have:

- **Alignment** (line of sight) between strategic and operational goals and tactical solutions with coordinated and cohesive management
- **Improved** value achievement through better implementation and adoption of solutions, workflows, and processes
- **Agility** with a workforce able to keep up with business objectives and demands

How MAKE Solutions can help

MAKE Solutions operational excellence services focus on helping organizations select the right thing at the right time and deliver the right way.

Consider our offerings for assistance optimizing and achieving synergized organizational governance decision making, coordinated data driven portfolio management, and an agile and continually developing workforce with efficient daily operating procedures.

Self-discovery tools that aid you in exploring your organization's governance processes, portfolio management maturity, and operational practices.

Operational Excellence workshops and materials for your leaders to establish shared understanding and expectations, make decisions, and deliver a developed action plan to improve the effectiveness of decision-making, achieve line of sight to strategy, optimize portfolio management, and advance IT's operational structure and practices.

For more information

Visit our website at makesolutionsinc.com or contact Tamara Pomerantz, VP Client Operations, Tamara.Pomerantz@makesolutionsinc.com.