

Abstract

It's hard to get all the parts of a complex organization working together. And it's hard to make sure you deploy technology that meets the needs of a complex organization, in a timely and cost effective way. Every organization is unique - there is no 'one size fits all' technology solution. The key is to drive from the business strategy, and to use triage to identify and invest in only the best technology opportunities. Advanced Strategies can provide a practical way to identify and prioritize technology projects according to business needs.

Mixing business and technology can be a headache

Everyone has some experience trying to make business work better using technology. What have we learned?

- Technology projects are risky, expensive, and time consuming. You need to make sure you pick the right projects before you start.
- Business and IT don't always talk to each other, and when they do, they don't have a common language for communicating what the business needs from technology.
- Business people rarely make the time to plan, especially for technology; yet strategic decisions and tradeoffs exert leverage far beyond most daily activities. But a planning approach has to be practical - based on common sense and using participants time effectively.
- There are lots of ideas for using technology, but not all will have a positive impact on the business. If you have a project backlog, how do you see what's 'not there' - the good projects that have not been identified by users? Or know which projects have the most potential? You need to do a systematic scan for business condition and technology potential.

Wanted: a business-driven process for identifying and setting technology priorities

Strategic Information Resource Management Planning (SIRMP) is a process for identifying and prioritizing IT projects based on an organization's business strategy. SIRMP helps build the IT project portfolio that's right for you.

- **SIRMP** is driven from the business. Planning is done by business stakeholders, using their business knowledge; no technical expertise is required. The results fit the organization's needs and culture.
- The planning process starts with consensus on a structured expression of the business strategy; proceeds through an assessment of current business processes and information needs; and ends with defined projects in priority order. Each step is intellectually manageable, and follows logically.
- Facilitated planning sessions help get the right information as efficiently as possible. Discussions stay focused; decisions are documented. A structured process with briefings and templates gathers consistent information.
- A web-based planning database captures the results of planning, and provides a basis for guiding projects and priorities going forward.
- Planning is done by appropriate sub-units of the organization, then collected for an overview of the whole organization.

Here's how SIRMP can help

Using **SIRMP** to plan for IT projects has these benefits:

- Provides the time and place for planning, and a structure to guide participants through the process.
- Because business stakeholders created the plan, they will understand it. And because they make the priority decisions, they are more comfortable with the necessary tradeoffs. Less desirable projects never get started.
- The strategic business planning process helps business stakeholders adopt an enterprise mindset, making it possible to look for opportunities across departmental boundaries.
- Provides a basis for making rational go-no go decisions on projects by describing projects in business terms; clearly identifies business benefit.
- Gathers sub-organization plans into a single repository for enterprise-level visibility

SIRMP in action

SIRMP was used to do IT planning for all agencies in the State of Minnesota for fiscal years 2000 and 2002. The results:

- Agencies produced documented plans – many for the first time
- Funding decisions could be made with consistent information
- In addition to big-picture projects, agencies discovered quick hits - low or no cost opportunities
- Agency CIO's have clear direction from the business
- Agency staffers have a better understanding of business goals
- There is now better enterprise-level visibility in a very decentralized organization
- There is now a basis for finding cross-agency project opportunities

Conclusion

Technology is essential to any business today... but how can you be sure to deploy technology effectively? **SIRMP** provides a practical approach to strategic IT planning that is driven from the business strategy by business stakeholders. It will help business stakeholders and IT work together better by establishing a common vision of the business direction and the best technology projects to help the organization meet its goals. And it will help ensure that your investments in technology will provide the maximum benefit to the business.

Advanced Strategies has been helping major organizations with business planning, IT planning, business modeling, and systems development projects for over 12 years. Recent SIRMP projects include the State of Minnesota and the Centers for Disease Control.

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