Why the Traditional Services Approach to Enterprise Software Projects No Longer Works

Innovating for better solution delivery: the three new pillars of services success.

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Executive Summary

Challenge

Every organization seeks the shortest path to a perfectly deployed software solution. Whether using internal or external teams on these projects, organizations create unwinnable paradoxes that stem from a traditional orientation to carefully structure projects, commit to well-defined outcomes and accept long-duration projects to achieve large-scale results. A short list of these problems include:

- Poorly scoped projects which fail to consider the solution’s full potential or the organization’s true needs
- A rigid approach to project management that considers course-correction a challengeable expense or sign of failure
- Bad transparency that gets worse as the project progresses
- Over- or under-budgeting

Opportunity

To deliver bigger results, even on complex deployments of sophisticated enterprise solutions, organizations should consider an alternative approach based on agile methods. One that increases information exchange and transparency in a highly collaborative environment where identifying opportunities to course-correct is encouraged and teams are structured to make faster decisions and prioritize more adeptly as they discover new information and needs.

Benefits

With a smarter approach to solution delivery, organizations can achieve more of their goals in deploying a solution, faster, more consistently and with less wasted budget and effort. When project teams are organized to collaborate and iterate more quickly by default, they can remain continually focused on the highest-priority work to achieve the full potential of the software solution.
Section 1

The Evolving Paradigm of Software Delivery

It’s impossible to deny that today’s organizations are under stress. Whether from financial or competitive pressure, increasing regulatory requirements or simply from operating in the fast-paced application economy, the challenges—and the stakes—have never been higher.

This stress is transmitted to IT organizations: their staff, their hardware and software infrastructures, and their budgets. But paradoxically, and to the chagrin of IT, users often remain oblivious to these enterprise concerns. Instead of thinking holistically, they pick and choose which applications to use and adopt, assessing software value with each software interaction.

Combining these pressures with broad mandates to drive business innovation powered by technology, organizations are reconsidering what they really need and expect from external IT professional services vendors who assist with enterprise software projects. The old model no longer works. When working with third parties on software projects, organizations are now looking to collaborate more seamlessly, iterate faster and pursue standard, out-of-the-box deployments adapted to meet their specific needs.

While expectations of individual users and businesses have evolved, and software innovation strives to lead or keep up, the approach to IT professional services offerings has been slower to change. In the application economy, it is critical to move beyond traditional services models to capture the hearts and minds of users who are key to driving business value.

- How can software projects deliver value more efficiently and provide more transparency for executives and stakeholders?
- How can project teams be nimble, course-correct as needed and still commit to a budget, scope, schedule and project plan?
- How can organizations simultaneously and more precisely address near-term and long-term needs?
- How do organizations assemble teams that excel at project execution and technical design, and drive solution adoption, organizational training and communication?
- Where can teams innovate in their approach to the project? Given staffing, budget and infrastructure constraints, where do teams find flexibility to accommodate specific needs?

With each passing era in IT, organizations are drawn to find new ways to obtain maximum value from software. Expand or curtail customization? Insource or outsource? Select best-of-breed point products or integrated platforms? Address near-term priorities quickly or prioritize long-term value?

Each software paradigm shift (from out-of-the-box software to custom and highly configured software to SaaS delivery and hosted models) presents an opportunity to reassess the role IT professional services can play to unlock more value for organizations.
Why the Traditional Services Model No Longer Works

Traditionally, enterprise software services from external service providers were a post-licensing transactional event for software vendors and customers focused on installing software, and typically followed this structure:

- An organization would sign a one- to three-year software licensing agreement
- IT professional services would install and configure the software, then prescribe training
- The solution went live

The services project ends and IT scrambles to extract promised ROI from the implemented solution. When required, or when there was ample time, budget and/or available skilled resources (perhaps many quarters later), the customer and professional services team would assess rolling out an upgrade or optimizing the deployed solution. Below, we outline some challenges to this outdated model.

Assembling and managing talented project teams with the right skills

Often, the best in-house resources are already committed to other projects. Assigning the full roster of the right resources to address projects can result in team overload and inefficient multitasking.

Incurring project initiation and closure overhead

Intermittent IT professional services engagements result in multiple learning curves (overhead) for both parties across successive projects as teams ramp up, prioritize work and close and handoff projects at completion.

Adjusting and delivering results in real time

Software solutions are part and parcel with business and IT processes, and are tightly integrated with other technologies—all of which are changing in real time. Projects need to accomplish results at the same fast cadence that organizations work; otherwise targets may change and dependencies may shift, causing business and IT alignment to fall out of step. How might an organization manage the intersection of discrete software projects and more expansive organization change management (OCM) initiatives?

Focusing on solution adoption

More individuals, within and external to IT, are direct stakeholders of software solutions. The consumerization of IT increases the need for effective training, quick adoption across the organization and achieving demonstrable value sooner. There is little time for volumes of documentation, complex planning, bureaucratic approval cycles, and lengthy training.

Achieving and measuring ROI

Investments in software and the return on those investments go beyond licensing and maintenance considerations. IT professional services engagements should help organizations derive strong ROI on the downstream expenditures (not just license expense) associated with solution adoption. One example: what is the ROI on a lunch-and-learn event or solution health check with subject matter experts?
Determining “mission accomplished”

Contractual arrangements based on time and materials belies the need for outcome-based measures of completed projects. When to call a project done? Who decides, using what measures? How do we redefine done when things change midstream?

Knowing what users want beforehand

Organizations and their users often learn or validate what they need from a product as it is being implemented or as new capabilities go live. In many cases, capturing and codifying extensive requirements before an organization interacts with the solution at some level yields subpar results, frustrated users and expensive change requests. Iterative requirements discovery and adaptive planning are needed for higher-value solutions to evolve.

Given the high costs of falling behind, business and technology leaders cannot afford a regimented, dogmatic, waterfall approach to IT professional services projects.

The good news is that business stakeholders, IT departments and software vendors share a common goal: to derive greater value from software solutions, faster, to compete in the application economy.

Section 2:

A New Strategy: Collaborate, Iterate, Adapt—Faster

To make the most of substantial technology investments, organizations must adopt a new approach to IT professional services that’s focused on solution adoption and linked to delivering business value at each stage of a project. Projects must balance speed with precision, best practices with innovation and internal resource skills and bandwidth with externally sourced services consultants. At CA Services, we construct our approach around three pillars: collaborate, iterate and adapt.

Collaborate

Working in smaller teams that exchange more information provides customers with a better understanding of the solution’s potential and its optional capabilities that may be deployed later, and gives professional services teams a more grounded understanding of the business needs, constraints and aspirations of the customer. When needed, course corrections happen more quickly and more naturally.

To optimize value, customer teams and external professional services teams should collaborate on a defined cadence at every step of the process. This includes the obvious technical touchpoints as well as refining functional and technical design, evangelism, education, adoption and long-term solution road mapping. Leading services organizations don’t start or stop with implementation; they train internal resources like support, create education plans and work with stakeholders to get them fully on board.
Increasingly, with small internal IT teams and greater reliance on outsourced assistance, customers tend to prefer lighter weight but frequent services engagements that provide clear, measurable and incremental value, faster.

Iterate

Completely committing to an agile approach can be challenging for many organizations. In a recent survey, 16 percent of respondents were “Pure Agile,” while 75 percent took either a “Hybrid” or “Leaning toward Agile” approach.¹ Even those currently not planning to move toward agile practices will benefit from a faster, iterative approach to waterfall methodology. Iterating faster can improve speed and repeatability, empower learning across teams working together, and greatly benefit services projects.

Unlike traditional one-and-done projects, iterating more quickly can reveal issues, errors and opportunities for improvement, faster, and generally results in smaller teams sharing—and being responsive to—more information continually. This can lead to a healthy shift in decision making from executives to the people who are closest to project information and the daily work.

People need to share information in an appropriate context so it can be understood, consumed and used by others. This works best when expectations and Responsible/Accountable/Consulted/ Informed (RACI) elements are clearly delineated and communicated at the outset of a services engagement. The quality of the initiation phase can determine the speed, repeatability and learning that the customer’s and vendor’s teams can accomplish during subsequent phases of the engagement.

At each phase of a next-generation services methodology, the teams cycle through assessments to share how their tasks and deliverables support the underlying business case. As the teams work through the various phases of design, test, deploy and closure, or sprint, Scrum, project or epic backlog review, the ROI focus transitions to different categories of investment:

• Will users be properly trained and ready for the solution once it’s deployed to production or after a given sprint?

• Are executives and other stakeholders aware of and helping to drive value for the solution?

• What impact will the solution or release have on business processes?

• Are there operations and procedures that can be improved to streamline IT administration and support organizational change?

Evaluating work in these areas can greatly improve the near- and long-term ROI of the solution. Organizations can deploy and run the software solution efficiently with the capabilities most critical to their business—and set the stage for deploying additional capabilities over time based on a long-term value roadmap or on a smartly groomed backlog. As the organization’s needs evolve, the professional services team can ensure that the deployed solution does, too.
Adapt

All organizations want software to meet their unique needs. To accomplish this, they may enlist external partners to develop custom code, write scripts or add configurations on top of configurations. These services engagements yield unique solutions for customers and benefit professional services with repeat business and captive customers.

Over time, however, the custom code, complex scripts and layers of configurations cause enormous challenges for support; to upgrade, document and integrate: and for preparing and providing user training.

Increasingly, organizations want straightforward, out-of-the-box deployments that still meet the unique needs of their business. For organizations that want to avoid custom code and limit excessive configuration work, where can they find the flexibility to meet unique requirements? Enter solution delivery methodology.

Ideally, a deep technical understanding of the specific software product, the design of the actual services offering and the solution delivery methodology work in concert. A modern services approach can adapt each step of the implementation process to an organization’s specific circumstances.

It all begins with an understanding of functional and technical requirements, and iterating to improve them. This foundation is used to build a custom solution from prescriptive, proven business use cases or user stories, often using agile techniques. The discovery encompasses technology, people and processes, and includes regular stakeholder checkpoints to ensure alignment and focus on solution adoption.

Services engagements should naturally blend prescriptive, experience-based techniques with the customer’s objectives, scope, budget, resources, culture and technology footprint. The services team should provide predefined backlogs, prebuilt content and benchmark solution delivery artifacts.

Teams that adapt the solution delivery methodology to specific situations can tackle projects without wasting effort, make better use of available resources and provide a clearer focus on outcomes. The result? A more cost-effective and precise services engagement that meets objectives.

Many organizations aspire to apply agile methodologies to get to market faster, build high-quality products that customers value, and reduce risk and eliminate waste—but the logistics and transition can seem daunting. We can help you understand and transition to agile methods by combining expert agile training and coaching along with CA Agile Central (formerly Rally): a collaborative, enterprise SaaS platform for agile software development. Work with CA Services to adopt an agile approach—no matter where you are on your agile journey. Learn more.
Stronger results, faster

For many organizations, these three objectives—collaborate, iterate and adapt—seem ambitious at best and in conflict at worst. But when combined, each pillar informs the others. Frequent iterations allow for more effective collaboration. Better collaboration builds knowledge and trust, and helps streamline iterations. And organizations see stronger results, faster, at lower cost and higher ROI.

The Scaled Agile Framework® (SAFe®) is a proven, publically available approach for adopting agile on an enterprise scale. SAFe provides alignment across multiple agile teams, all focused on rapidly delivering value and supporting a common goal. Additionally, SAFe supports multiple Agile Release Trains and helps to include organizational changes and adoption activities at the portfolio, value stream, program and team levels. Learn more.

Section 3:

Apply Agile Principles to Software Delivery Projects

The CA Services Solution Delivery Methodology

Helping organizations achieve their business and IT objectives is our primary focus. To deliver the results and business value organizations expect from CA products, CA Services blends technical product expertise, field experience and our CA Solution Delivery Methodology to provide highly performing solutions through efficient, well-executed engagements that are tailored to each customer situation.

CA Services offers two approaches, agile and waterfall, which balance the benefits of proven best practices with the need for speed, collaboration and flexibility. From project initiation through go-live, and from sprint to sprint, we focus on solution adoption. To help ensure organizations achieve their desired outcomes, our teams of architects, consultants, project managers and Scrum Masters assist with project governance, agile coaching, change and risk management, executive reviews and seamless handoffs as the solution moves to production.
Section 4:

Conclusions

It’s time for professional services organizations to return to core principles: providing unparalleled customer service and support that make a tangible impact on objectives and outcomes. This means embracing flexibility and relying on proven methodologies that deliver greater value at lower cost, more efficiently. By focusing on the three pillars of modern services engagements—collaborate, iterate and adapt—CA Services does exactly that.

Learn more about our team, methodology, and more at www.ca.com/services.

Section 5:

About the Author

Adam Frary has more than 15 years of experience with enterprise software, and earned his MBA in global marketing and entrepreneurship from Babson College. His areas of expertise include project and portfolio management (PPM), IT service management (ITSM), database management, testing and fault management, and mainframe, distributed and cloud systems. Adam has worked in product management and product marketing, and currently supports marketing initiatives for PPM, ITSM and mainframe solutions—as well as for CA’s professional services solution delivery methodology.

CA Technologies (NASDAQ: CA) creates software that fuels transformation for companies and enables them to seize the opportunities of the application economy. Software is at the heart of every business, in every industry. From planning to development to management and security, CA is working with companies worldwide to change the way we live, transact and communicate—across mobile, private and public cloud, distributed and mainframe environments. Learn more at ca.com.