

Ten lessons every IT implementation teaches, eventually.



What independent IT assurance reveals about leadership, data, change and value.


Implementing IT systems is rarely just a technical project. It's an organisational transformation and a means to improve efficiency, enable growth and manage risk. Most organisations only fully realise this once delivery pressures collide with operational reality.

Based on our extensive experience of providing independent and objective programme assurance services for several clients over many years and across multiple industries, we have observed some recurring lessons:

1 Executive sponsorship isn't optional.

A committed executive sponsor clears roadblocks, secures budget and signals organisational priority. Without this level of leadership, projects stall, lose momentum, or become less important. "Success and failure often rest with the effectiveness of project Sponsorship", says Ria Pretorius, Director of Business Risk Services. The role of a sponsor should not be seen as peripheral to the project, nor be delegated to middle management without clear authority or mandate.

A project sponsor must play an integral part of the project by providing leadership through decisive decision making, setting goals, prioritising solutions, maintaining focus and (re-focus), and being fully accountable to the solution and benefits delivered.



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② Start with processes, not features.

Map and agree core processes before configuring software. Attempting to force-fit new technology onto broken or misaligned processes increases complexity, rather than reducing it.

③ Invest in data readiness early.

Poor data quality kills implementations. Data cleansing, standardisation, and ownership definition should begin during planning. Data quality must be addressed at source, not at target. A structured data migration workstream, supported by experienced resources, is critical to define appropriate principles, plans and migration strategies.

④ Treat change management as a deliverable.

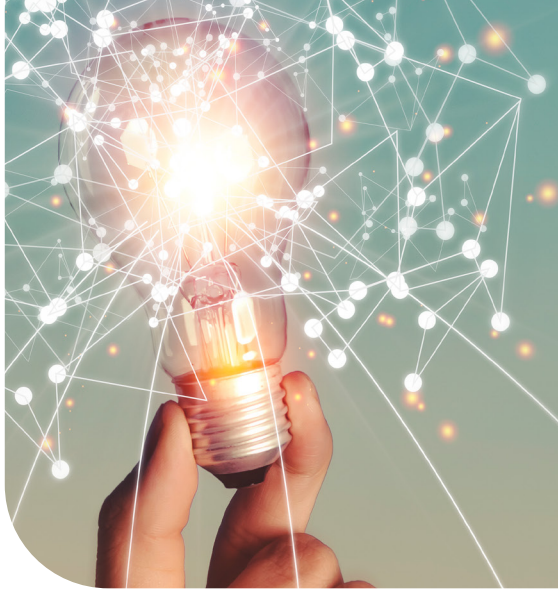
Training, role clarity, stakeholder communications and feedback channels must be budgeted, resourced and scheduled. Adoption is the real success metric. Users are central to project success and require deliberate planning and on-going engagement during and after implementation. Key activities that require proactive planning and specialist involvement include consistent communication of the intended changes, project/solution awareness campaigns, user training and on-going stakeholder support.

⑤ Test end-to-end, with real users.

Unit tests are fine, but production-like, role-based scenarios expose gaps. The pilot should involve a representative group, not just power users. Testing is frequently under-emphasised, despite being the final validation of solution quality and fitness for purpose prior to launch. Whether you are implementing using Agile or Waterfall delivery frameworks, sufficient testing is essential to protect the live environment and support user adoption and confidence.

Regression testing is important to ensure code stability following project enhancements and end-to-end user testing and performance testing after code freeze increases confidence that the system will perform as intended.





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A disciplined,
phased approach
enables iterative
delivery of measurable,
sustainable value.

6 Keep scope disciplined, plan for phases.

Large, complex organisations rarely succeed with “big-bang” approaches. Define a minimum viable implementation, then iterate. Each phase should deliver usable value. Phased or pilot implementations support de-risking of large-scale implementations, but only when accompanied by a clear cadence of valuable, manageable and measurable releases.

7 Define governance and KPIs up front.

Who makes decisions, how issues are prioritised, and which metrics define success? Agree on these before configuration starts. A structured, cascading governance framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities enables consistent, informed decision making. Establishing a shared understanding of the project’s “North Star” is crucial for effective decision making and maintaining strategic alignment throughout delivery.

8 Adapting to changes in market conditions.

IT programmes do not exist in isolation. It is critical that the project team continuously scans their environment and market to assess whether the project goals continue to align to the market need. The project Sponsor plays a critical role in maintaining continuous focus ensuring that solutions remain aligned to customer needs.

9 Project Visibility and Transparent Communication.

Visibility of project goals, expectations, milestones, tasks, risks and progress is essential not only for the Project Managers, but for all stakeholders. Transparent communication of project progress, whether using project management tools or manually created status reports, Agile boards or steering committee packs is critical for informed and effective decision making. The absence of this visibility, is detrimental to projects success and often results in project distress and failures.

10 Benefits and Value based tracking.

The business case should remain as a living document, not shelved once funding is approved. Successful projects align KPIs to realistic, measurable business objectives and track value throughout delivery. Use of Proof of Concept’s (POCs), Pilots and phased roll-outs enable early learning, allowing decisions to be guided by evidence and value creation.

Turning implementation into progress



At SNG Grant Thornton, our experienced senior team supports organisation across strategic and complex IT programmes, to maximise the return on investment and gain maximum adoption for long-term impact.

We help organisations learn these lessons earlier reducing risk, improving outcomes, and ensuring that technology investment delivers lasting progress.

Meet the Team

For general enquiries please contact us at info@sng.gt.com



Ria Pretorius CA(SA)

Director

Business Risk Services

Maria.Pretorius@sng.gt.com

T: 012 443 6000



Omar Hassan

Director

Business Consulting Services

Omar.Hassan@sng.gt.com

T: 012 443 6000



Oupa Mbokodo

Managing Director

Advisory Services

Oupa.Mbokodo@sng.gt.com

T: 012 443 6000



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