

Delivering risky projects in a post COVID world

Delivering significant projects and programmes to time, budget and scope has always been a risky business.



AS we emerge from the pandemic, the job of delivering projects has got a lot riskier

- The backlog of projects means that many have been initiated at the same time with a limited resource pool and in-demand skillsets
- Remote working has meant that project teams are still geographically spread and relying on Teams/Zoom etc for collaboration. This inevitably compromises communication and can stifle innovation.
- Embracing emerging technologies would be challenging in "normal" times but will be even harder in post-COVID times, semi-remote world. Hence complexity is increasing and risk with it.

This is all exacerbated by remote working practices where the oversight of leadership is limited and spread over a bulging project portfolio and making it much harder to get teams to follow necessary processes.

All of which makes a reliable and robust approach to effective risk management even more important. De-RISK has been working with strategic partners who are looking for a faster but equally reliable and action-orientated methodology to deliver key insights, without the need to get key partners around the table.

Most risk management processes are ineffective even in "normal times" to the degree that they merely satisfy the administration of risk by ticking the "risk management box" rather than proactively identifying any real risks as an effective risk management process should. Hampered further in post-covid times, we have extracted a process from our successful **Strategic Delivery Assurance (SDA)** methodology using structured techniques to analyse project plans, and thereby shine a light on the most sensitive assumptions being identified and which are therefore the source of greatest risk.

The Most Sensitive and Unstable Assumptions are the Source of Greatest Risk

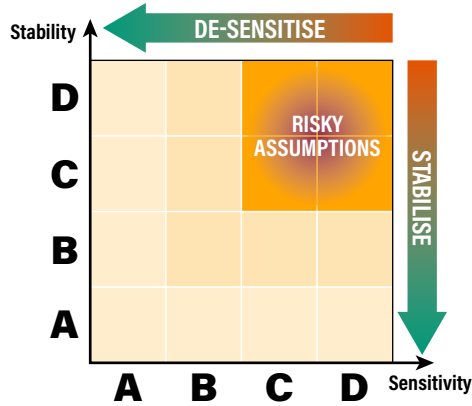
Risk is inherently driven by poor communications between project stakeholders. In this way, poor communications, is one of the greatest sources of risk because it leads to confusions, misinterpretations, hidden risks and ultimately are realised as significant issues that waste time, money and/or compromise objectives. So, if an effective way of improving communications in the team can be implemented quickly, the risks to the project will be fundamentally reduced.

Solving this is achieved by identification and communication of key assumptions which means risks are avoided or managed

proactively and project objectives are delivered on time. Our **Strategic Assumption Analysis (SAA)** allows this identification and communication to take place quickly (outside of full SDA), because it:

- Highlights key risks that may not have been identified to date
- Unblocks time or budget challenges by focusing on the most sensitive and unstable strategic assumptions, which highlights the areas of risk and opportunity to prioritise
- Checks that all stakeholders are on the same page

Through a series of rigorously structured (on-line) interviews, SAA captures the key strategic assumptions, ie the key things in the project that need to happen in order for it to succeed.



These assumptions are rated for sensitivity and stability by the originator, to identify the immediate, risky assumptions, and then cross-communicated by a facilitator to pick-up mismatches of expectations and understanding. In the best case, the team end up being all on the same page and in the “worst” case, critical risks (and opportunities) are identified that would never have been identified by traditional risk management approaches.

When applied to the strategic picture of the project portfolio there are several mitigations that may have a profound effect, e.g.:

- Designing out risk up-front by pro-actively redefining/ reducing scope early rather than waiting for the impacts and inevitable disappointments
- Forcing individuals to face up to the risks rather than looking for someone else to blame and protecting their own role
- Formal project prioritisation that ensures that only the most important projects are progressed that satisfy the organisation’s strategic objectives
- Allocating key resources to the right projects avoiding spreading too thinly or the projects shouting loudest getting the resources

SAA is a light-touch, rapid approach that has been effectively applied to traditional “waterfall” project management and Agile style approaches – and hybrids of both approaches.

SAA can have profound effects on the management of projects in the post-COVID world. The best time to do it is yesterday. The next best is today...