De-RISK

What does Strategic Delivery Assurance give me that I might have missed?

Five ways our SDA methodology builds on your existing plans and risk processes to tell you something you didn't already know.

It is not uncommon to hear that plans are well developed, risk mitigation plans are already complete and that confidence levels are already high. Over many years' experience, we have found our Strategic Delivery Assurance always brings an additional level of confidence and insight over traditional methodologies:

1. **"We have already developed a detailed plan":** When we start an engagement with a programme, there is always some kind of plan in place. Often the plan is detailed and confidence appears to be justifiably high. The danger is that plans are often overly optimistic or worse, created by fixing an end date and then "squeezing" in all the actions and activities to fit the timescale. The advantage SDA brings here is to bring a new dimension to the plan. Using rigorous, tried and tested methods, we will get you to stand back, challenge assumptions and be realistic with yourselves. We'll challenge and clear away some of the clutter; often plans are too detailed and seeing "the wood for the trees" becomes difficult. Our methodology focuses clients and strategic partners to focus on just the critical paths to bring clarity and focus.

2. **"We know what our critical path is already:"** Often this can be a mixed message. If plans are overly complex, the emerging critical path may not be the right one and may fail to identify emerging threats elsewhere. In addition, even if the right critical path is identified, it might not be clear that it is not achievable, and where mitigation is needed. SDA identifies and models all the potential critical paths so that you can see the degrees of criticality and take appropriate action. Most frequently, we find SDA brings added value over the commonly used QSRA (Quantitative Schedule Risk Analysis) methodology. While QSRA also defines critical paths, it works on the principle that the "squeezed" plan is correct and therefore bakes in an optimism that is not appropriate and inevitably leads to missed milestones.. SDA brings a more strategic extraction of the schedule which is more reliable and leads to an increased chance of programme success. (If you have already completed a QSRA, or are thinking of using one, read our blog on the gaps and problems with this methodology.)

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3. **"We have already identified our risks":** In a large-scale complex programme, it is highly unlikely that all risks have been identified at any given point in time – apart from at the end! It is even more unlikely that the risks are all expressed in a form that makes the root-cause clear and actionable. Clients tell us that one of the chief benefits of our SDA methodology is the rigorous, assumption-based approach to identify the specific strategic risky assumptions that need to be managed to deliver the objectives. Due primarily to the psychology built into the SDA process, there are always significant risky assumptions identified that have not been identified before and thus SDA brings an insight and a peace of mind that is often not found with other approaches.

4. **"We have prioritised our risks":** This can be very subjective and thus is a minefield for senior management where priorities can be biased towards local needs or 'who shouts loudest'. Without a strategic process, the wrong risks can be prioritised for the wrong reasons. SDA ensures a top-down, strategic structure to ensure prioritisation is set-up and maintained through-out the programme. In addition, the SDA risk profile "bubble diagrams" allow senior management to see the current state and the trends over time that tell them, on one page, if they are winning or losing the battle to control the risks, based on the positioning and the clustering of the bubbles.

5. **"We already have action plans for our risks":** As points 1-4 above show, this is can already be fraught with problems if plans have failed to accurately identify all the risks and in a useful form. It is also likely that the action plans generated are "generic" and high-level rather than specific and actionable i.e. "SMART". SDA uses a proven governance process to ensure accountability and follow-through on mitigating actions and feeds directly back into the bubble diagram trend analysis to take the guess work out of action plan progress.

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In summary, if you hear these phrases as part of your programme planning, you need to be alert to the missed or inappropriate assumptions behind them. Simple or repeated projects may not need the rigour of SDA, but if your programme is large, complex and/or innovative in some way, then incorporating SDA into your programme management will always tell you something valuable that you didn't know, resulting in more accurate and reliable delivery outcomes.

For more examples on how specifically SDA has brought project delivery back on track, and saved time and money on many occasions, click here.

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