

Coping with internal risks

Internal risks come mainly from three sources : the project, the organizations involved, and the relationships among partners. All fifteen projects encountered one or several of these risks. Most projects suffered, at least temporarily, from a deficient project structure: many were launched even though objectives were not clear, a business case had not been completed, and milestones were only vaguely defined, if defined at all. On the organizational side, lack of project control mechanisms was the factor that most impeded many projects. Finally, risks associated with the relationships among partners was present in all projects, cultural differences being mentioned as the most important problem for collaboration.

The **Cadastre Quebec** project (real property tax mapping) encountered many problems in getting the project started, mainly because of project planning deficiencies. On the second try, a team of experienced project managers was brought in from other agencies. As the project manager put it:

"... you work out operating agreements and service level agreements. Then you know who needs to call who. So one of the things I can take credit for is that piece, setting it up so that we have things like project charters, project plans, weekly meetings ."

On completion, the project was evaluated as a full success: budget, schedule and specifications had been met. Even though a competent project management team cannot resolve all problems, in this case, it was decisive. The main partner, the Ministry of Natural Resources, had first refused the risk and gave the project a second life by restructuring it. Bringing in new and competent managers on the second round was a critical factor in the eventual success of the project.

The Canadian project **Partners in Change** aimed at reorganizing the delivery of social support for unemployed persons. The reengineering focused on an electronic case management system that was to simplify the paperwork and enable workers to spend more of their time to develop a significant and helpful relationship with clients. As expressed by a case manager:

"I think that naturally people are scared, they were worried with their future, in terms of their jobs and their classification, if they had education and the desired training to stay and to be competitive in the new organization. When you take a service delivery model and you change it, people are nervous."

The project managers first accepted the risk and then took specific measures to cope with this resistance to change. They invited union representatives to participate in an implementation committee so that all steps taken would be understood and approved by the union and employees would be properly informed. In addition, the project team traveled around the province, meeting all employees in local agencies to convince the social workers of the utmost importance of adopting this new philosophy for helping unemployed people become self-sufficient. They emphasized how putting in place these innovative work processes would enhance their jobs and the quality of the service they offered. These efforts contributed to a highly successful result.

The **New York GIS Coordination** project first encountered a very slow rate of local government participation in its data sharing cooperative because of local bureaucracies and legal authorities that needed to understand and approve the data sharing agreements. Some were skeptical because no overt costs were involved. Consequently, they feared there were hidden costs.

"There was a lot of skepticism at the beginning. Local governments were looking for the hook: [They asked] 'What are you going to hook me with later, are you going to come and take my data?' There was also a lack of understanding for the usefulness of the data beyond ones borders."

In order to overcome these organizational and relationship barriers, a mitigation response was put in place: the program managers devised a standard data sharing agreement oriented towards user needs, with clearly written clauses, and easy termination for those wishing to withdraw. These features encouraged reluctant localities to try out the cooperative and all who did decided to stay.

When the **FirstGov** project was launched to put in place a portal for the U.S. federal government, it had only 90 days to reach implementation. The ambitious goal was to enable government-to-citizen (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), and government-to-government (G2G) information access and transactions. No single agency could deliver such a system and meet the challenge of the schedule put in place by President Bill Clinton. It took a broad partnership to meet that goal:

"FirstGov is a unique example of a public-private partnership among the U.S. General Services Administration, the Federal Chief Information Officers Council, Vice-President Gore's National Partnership for Reinventing Government, the Government Information Technology Services Board, private sector information industry

companies, and the Fed-Search Foundation created by Dr. Eric Brewer, Chief Scientist at Inktomi."

Externalization made it possible to share among these partners the political risks associated with the project, as well as the organizational risks. This shared risk-taking was essential because no agency had the resources, the competencies, and the technological know-how to undertake such an ambitious and complex project alone.