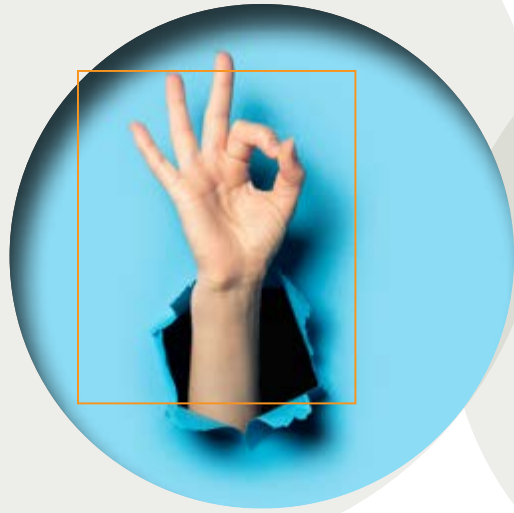


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Defining Success

PART 3: INCREMENTAL WINS ARE SUCCESS

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For many of us that started writing software early in its commercial inception, we often modeled our project approach like you would a large-scale engineering project. We thought, if one is to build a rocket that can go the moon, it must have every last detail thought out and developed before we make that first launch attempt.

The astronauts aboard those ships would thank the engineering team for this well-thought-out plan, ensuring their safety not only up into space, but also back down to earth. Building the spaceship as you fly it isn't possible, so much more detailed planful thought must be involved in a project where human life is at stake. If one thing goes wrong because of inadequate planning, it can mean catastrophic failure.

Contrast this with software projects that strive for business process improvement. If we look at a typical business process, there are multiple inputs, decision points, actions,

and outputs along the chain. When we map these, it becomes clear where bottlenecks can exist and where manual process could potentially be automated.

This mapping exercise and subsequent planning can produce a large-scale project like we described above. In the early days of software development, we may have looked at that project and made the statement: "In order to count this project as a success, we must complete all aspects of it from start to finish."

This approach would lead us into waterfall methodology, involving months of requirement specification followed by technical design and architecture. Then comes months of development followed by quality assurance and further break fixing along the way.

As is well documented, the vast majority of these projects failed. Requirements changed along the way, business

priorities shifted, budgets were interrupted, etc.

Our approach these days thinks about that business process optimization problem differently. While we may choose to map out the processes in their entirety and even build the overall release plan for the end-to-end project, we are much more adept at looking at smaller, incremental pieces and identifying where little, quick wins are possible. Automate one piece of the flow to reduce the hours of manual labor. Fix a single bottleneck to improve the overall processing time.

If you never get to the “whole project”, these incremental changes are still wins. You have achieved success by improving the process. You may even learn that your original assumptions of what needed to be done are no longer relevant with the improvements you’ve made.

How are you looking at your projects this year to find small, incremental wins?

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