

MSP Survival Guide for Senior Responsible Owners has been written specifically for you (the SRO), full of helpful advice to make your hectic life easier.

There are many reasons why programmes fail, but failure to grasp the scale of the change being delivered and weak leadership of the programme teams are often contributing factors.

As you are unlikely to have time to read the MSP guide or to go on courses, we have covered the main things that you will need to know in a format that can be easily referenced.

In this series of extracts we are publishing a summary of the key points from each of the chapter of the MSP Survival Guide for SROs.

The author of the MSP Survival Guides is Rod Sowden, who is the current lead author of the main MSP® manual. He is the Managing Director of Aspire Europe and has been heavily involved in delivery major programmes and developing ideas and guidance that are used around the world.

Magnificent Seven

Build in a risk budget The world will not stand still during the programme, and having a viable risk budget will help to maintain realism with stakeholders.

Transition budgets to support operations are essential These are often missed from business cases, so when the time comes to deliver transition there are inadequate resources.

Funding will be volatile So keep your finger on the pulse of the organization's financial forecasts and commitments to ensure your funds don't evaporate unexpectedly.

Plan for changes of direction At the end of each tranche, you should seek independent validation of the viability of your programme in terms of benefits, costs and executive support.

Engage the decision makers early Test the appetite for the programme and set positive expectations in terms of benefits before focusing on costs.

Beware of benefits double-counting or optimism bias Ensure the costs and benefits have a risk profile so that there is transparency about potential risk areas.

Keep the business case short or at least precise(depends on organizations) The justification exists within a number of other documents which you can attach as appendices.

Programme Business case

‘Nothing defines humans better than their willingness to do irrational things in the pursuit of phenomenally unlikely payoffs.’ Scott Adams

Business cases themselves come in all shapes and sizes, varying from a one-page document to tomes hundreds of pages long. The sheer length and list of things that many organizations require to be included, coupled with a complex approval process, can seem calculated to make even the best SRO wilt. If this programme is the pet idea of your boss, the unenviable task of telling them the figures don’t add up will fall to you – but better that than spending large sums of money on a white elephant.

If you would like to buy a copy of the MSP Survival Guide for SRO’s, please [follow this link](#) and use the following code **SG15**.

The absolute worst sin you can commit is deliberately underestimating the cost and timescale to get your pet initiative accepted hoping once its underway it wont get stopped even though the cost increases. There are likely to be few if any winners but there will be lots of losers such as those who don’t get the benefits.

You should keep the business case close to hand (or at least the summary if it is one of the 100-page types). The business case is your contract with your Executive and investment decision makers, and you are accountable for delivering on that contract, so use it as your decision-making compass.

The business case defines your world – it is the top of your document hierarchy, the capstone piece where the options, costs, benefits and risks are brought together in a single document. The core purpose of the business case is to secure approval for the programme to proceed. It enables those responsible for investment decisions in an organization to make an informed decision based on a clearly argued case and an appreciation of the implications

Part of your role is to push the programme team to reduce costs and identify more benefits, especially if the numbers don’t stack up. A revised approach, or the application of techniques such as value engineering, can often result in a better proposal, and it is right to challenge people. Be sure that your pressure does not result in the production of an unrealistic business case that looks good on paper but is undeliverable in practice.

*‘Statistics are used much like a lamppost: for support, not illumination.’
Vin Scully*

Sometimes, it is simply not possible to create a business case for the whole life of a programme. The later stages and the end game may be unclear for a whole host of reasons. In such cases, it may be appropriate to break the programme down into a number of discrete tranches and have an interim blueprint and a business case for each tranche. The important thing here is that each tranche has to deliver standalone improvements that provide sustainable value even if the programme were to be terminated.

This detailed work will be managed by the programme manager, with a lot of the input coming from the business change managers (BCMs). While you do not need to be closely involved with this, you should set the scene and ensure the programme manager and BCMs are clear about the scope and ambition of the programme and understand the job they have to do. Remember, as the leader it is your job to explain the programme and address some or all of the following problems:

- People don’t understand what you are trying to achieve, or why.
- People may understand, but not see how it can be achieved.
- People may not have time to understand.
- People may be opposed in some degree to the necessary changes.