

# How to Save Failing Software Projects

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Some of the software projects that companies implement fail. Stuart Smith has a method for saving them.



When companies install and use new software, the process is usually problematic: Representatives from information technology sit down with representatives from the business, and the two groups figure out everything that they need the software to do. Then IT builds the software and gives it to the business people to use. End of story.

What this process doesn't take into account is that it's almost impossible to know exactly how something is supposed to work ahead of time, Smith, director of CRM (customer relationship management) architecture and performance for British Telecom tells the Business Technology Blog. Sure, you can account for a system's major components, but the small things—like the order in which different screens appear or the number of choices in a drop down menu—tend to get overlooked or designed in a way that doesn't match how people end up using the software. Also, there can be small technical glitches that IT didn't account for, and that non-technical users never know can be fixed. These small things add up, and if there are enough of them, people will grow frustrated and stop using a system.

Smith wanted to avoid this when he rolled out Oracle's Siebel CRM software to 12,000 of BT's call center workers in 30 locations 18 months ago. So in addition to the Oracle software, he bought monitoring software from Knoa. "We now understand how people use the systems that we build," he tells this blog. And this has allowed his team to identify and fix problems before they cause users to rebel against the system.

In some cases, the computers that the workers were using weren't configured properly, which caused the Siebel system to perform poorly. In other cases, the call center workers weren't following the process that the IT department had been told they were going to follow, and ended up using parts of the system that were less stable. Some problems, like the computer configuration, had technical fixes. Other problems resulted in more training for the workers. And when BT found that the initial design forced workers to wade through extraneous data, the IT team redesigned parts of the system.

"We figured out ways to save two or three mouse clicks," says Smith. "That doesn't sound like much, but when you are dealing with tens of thousands of calls a day, that can translate into significant savings."