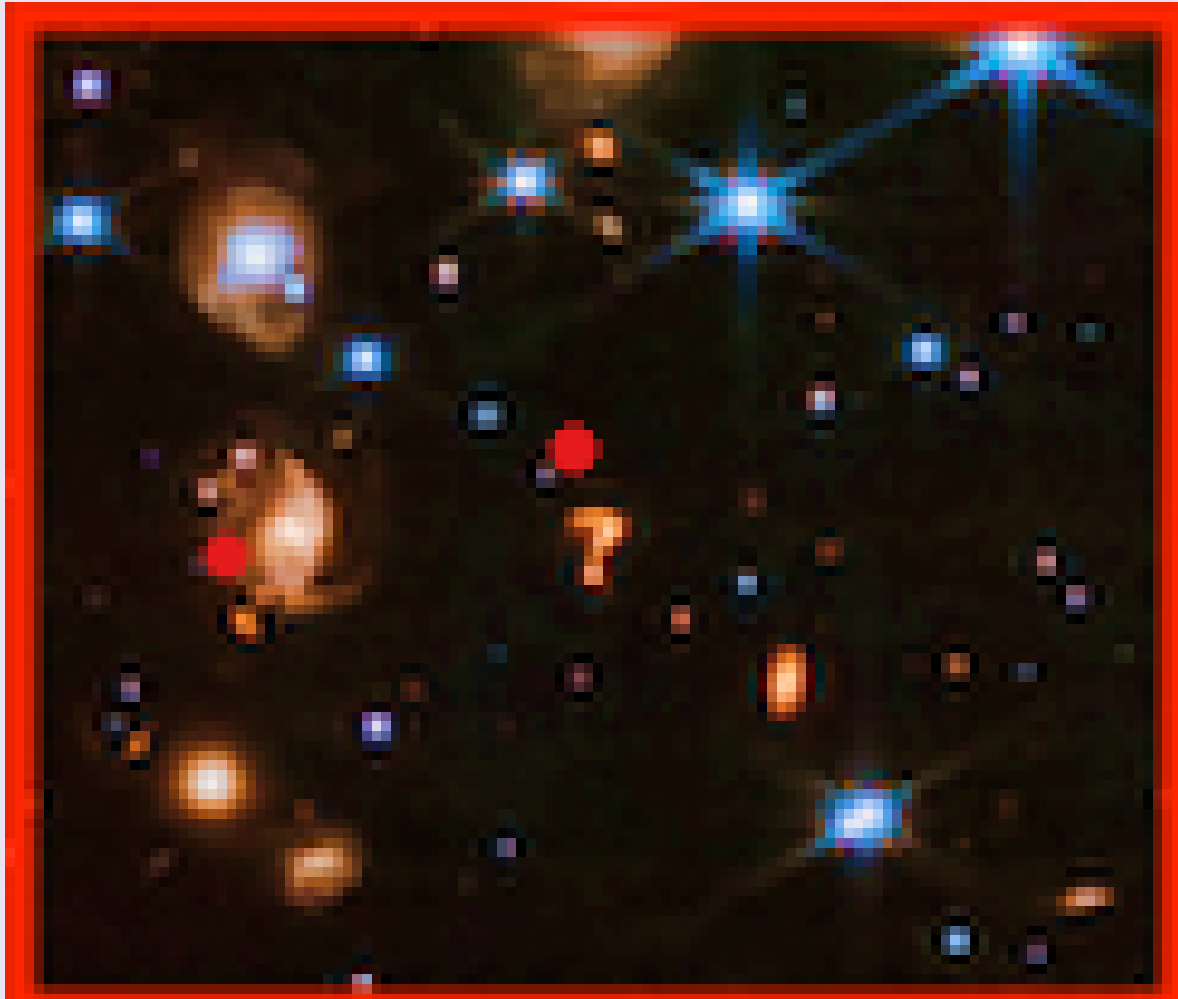


*Is project and programme assurance
useful, or a waste of time?*

Alan Grant



Why would an organisation want project or programme assurance?



Why would an organisation want project or programme assurance?



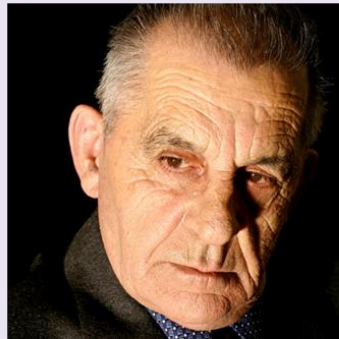
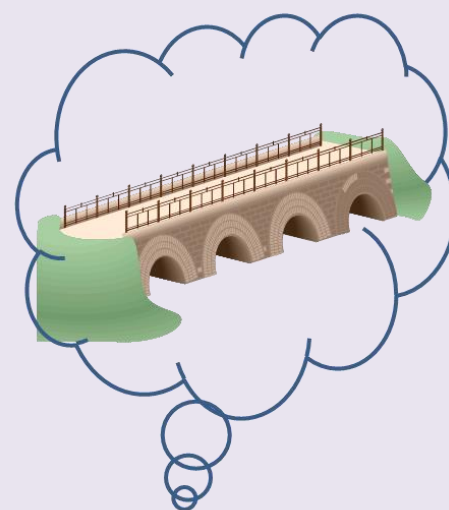


Alice: “Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here”

Cat: “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”

Alice: “I don’t much care where...”

Cat: “then it doesn’t matter which way you go.”



If your project aims to build a bridge, and this is what your various stakeholders are thinking, you've got work to do!

Why would an organisation want project or programme assurance?



- Necessitates a clearly agreed, thorough definition of success
- “Your project will only be considered successful if its key stakeholders perceive the project’s outcome as a success” - Lynda Bourne
- Improve benefits realisation
- Project success factors reinforced
- Assist in reducing risk of failure on a programme or project - consider common causes of Project Failure
- But how often do projects fail, anyway?

What percentage of projects fail?



- Standish Group: 66% of technology projects (based on analysis of 50,000 projects) end in partial or total failure¹
- McKinsey found that 17% of large IT projects go so badly, they threaten the very existence of the company³
- BCG (2020) estimated that 70% of digital transformation efforts fall short of meeting targets
- CISQ report (2020) found the total cost of unsuccessful development projects among US firms is estimated \$260 billion
- PMI forum: Range [of project failure] is between 65%-75%²



But what does project failure mean?

- Discussion on the PMI Central forum - forum participant Mark Warner, Project Manager, AURA elaborates:

“... It’s really hard to get to a bottom-line number, but from data from PMI, Standish, Wrike, et al, - approx. 75% of projects fail to meet at least one of their stated baseline objectives;

... this includes failure to meet full scope of deliverables, failure to meet all quality requirements, failure to make schedule, and/or failure to stay within budget.

Why would an organisation want project or programme assurance?



James Webb Space Telescope



<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-189>

Could project and programme assurance be a waste of time?



Could project or programme assurance be a waste of time?



- Ticking the boxes that have already been checked
- Mechanically going through the motions of necessary compliance activity
- Telling governance and/or external monitoring agencies just what they want to hear
- Assurance reviews that become “shelfware” -
 - ... reporting on findings that are not considered or not acted upon

Why would an organisation want project or programme assurance?



- Increase confidence in a successful outcome
- Establish a healthy level of trust in many facets:
 - Achievable Business Case
 - Programme governance
 - Programme management
 - Project team
- Speed of trust:
 - Reduce burden of excessive oversight and compliance costs
 - Supports a positive and constructive team culture

Reasons for Project Assurance

1. It necessitates a well-rounded and thorough definition of project success
 2. It promotes objectivity in gauging project success
 3. It creates a culture of shared responsibility in an organization
- PMI's 2015 Pulse of the Profession Report states that "less than two-thirds of projects and programs have actively engaged executive sponsors." This can lead to more widespread disengagement. Often coupled with that is poor distribution of responsibility. All this leads to a culture of blame when projects fail to meet their goals.
 - Project assurance turns a culture of blame into a culture of responsibility. This means the project board and team need an open dialogue about the project's progress, positive or negative. Project assurance combats any form of scapegoating. Instead, it unites project teams and stakeholders in pursuit of common goals.

Reasons for Project Assurance

4. Effective assurance strongly supports more constructive stakeholder engagement
5. Engage assurance early to ensure early visibility and better engagement of change
6. The business benefit owners are getting on board early and buying into the outcomes
7. Project teams set up for success with a constructive culture – team members feel safe and share trust

Example Project, Programme and Portfolio Assurance Activities:

- Government facilitated/mandated for large/ risky programme assurance e.g. Gateway reviews
- Independent Quality Assurance (IQA) reviews
- Technical Quality Assurance (TQA) reviews
- Project Programme and Portfolio Management Maturity Model (P3M3) assessments
- Internal assurance reviews – e.g. project and programme health checks

What makes effective Project, Programme and Portfolio Assurance?

The right approach and a right kind of person who can carry it off ...

- Authenticity
- Empathy
- Knowledge and credibility
- “Power” skills
- Trusted

Stakeholder Engagement

A key differentiator – to ensure project success – references:

- OGC: Common Causes of Project Failure
- Examples from my own experience
- Examples from project managers I have observed, managed and coached
- “Your project will only be considered successful if its key stakeholders perceive the project’s outcome as a success” - Lynda Bourne.

Approach and Tools

- Project Health Checks
- Independent Quality Assessments (IQAs)
- Technical Quality Assessments (TQAs)
- Gateway Reviews
- Pre-Gateway Assessment/ preparation
- Ongoing assurance monitoring – especially for projects using agile or hybrid methods.
- **IMPORTANT:** *Make sure you can provide adequate documentation and access to people for interviews*

Value Add

- Often the value is during PHC, IQA, TQA and/or Gateway review – more than in the report
- Preparing for the review necessitates useful re-consideration of project status
- “Management” response to review recommendations important:
- Very limited value in doing a report and not considering/ acting on the rec’s.

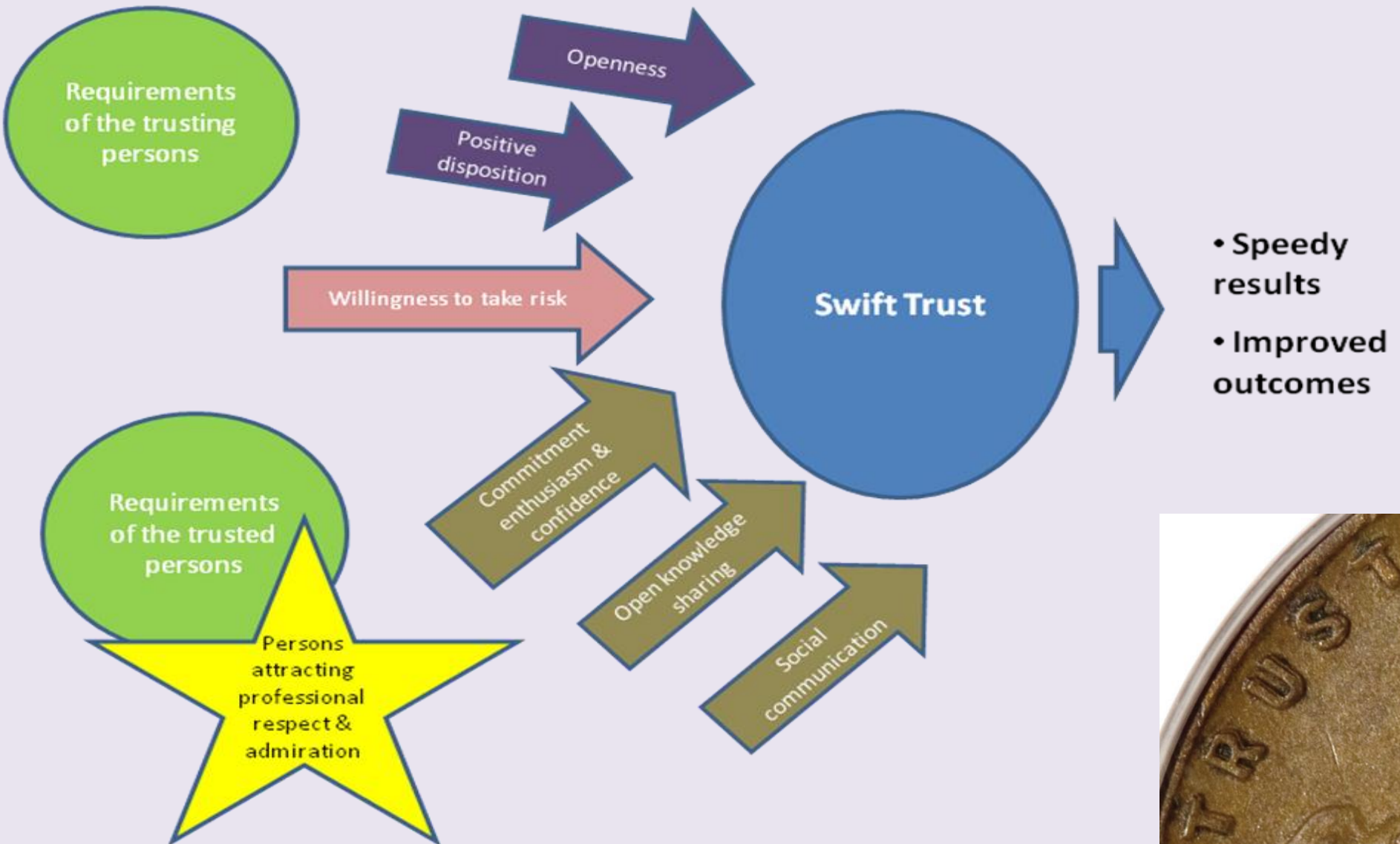
Choosing an IQA or TQA Provider

- Terms of Reference – be clear what you want them to consider
- Consider reputation and references
- GCDO or Digital Government Assurance support
- Templates and guides available:

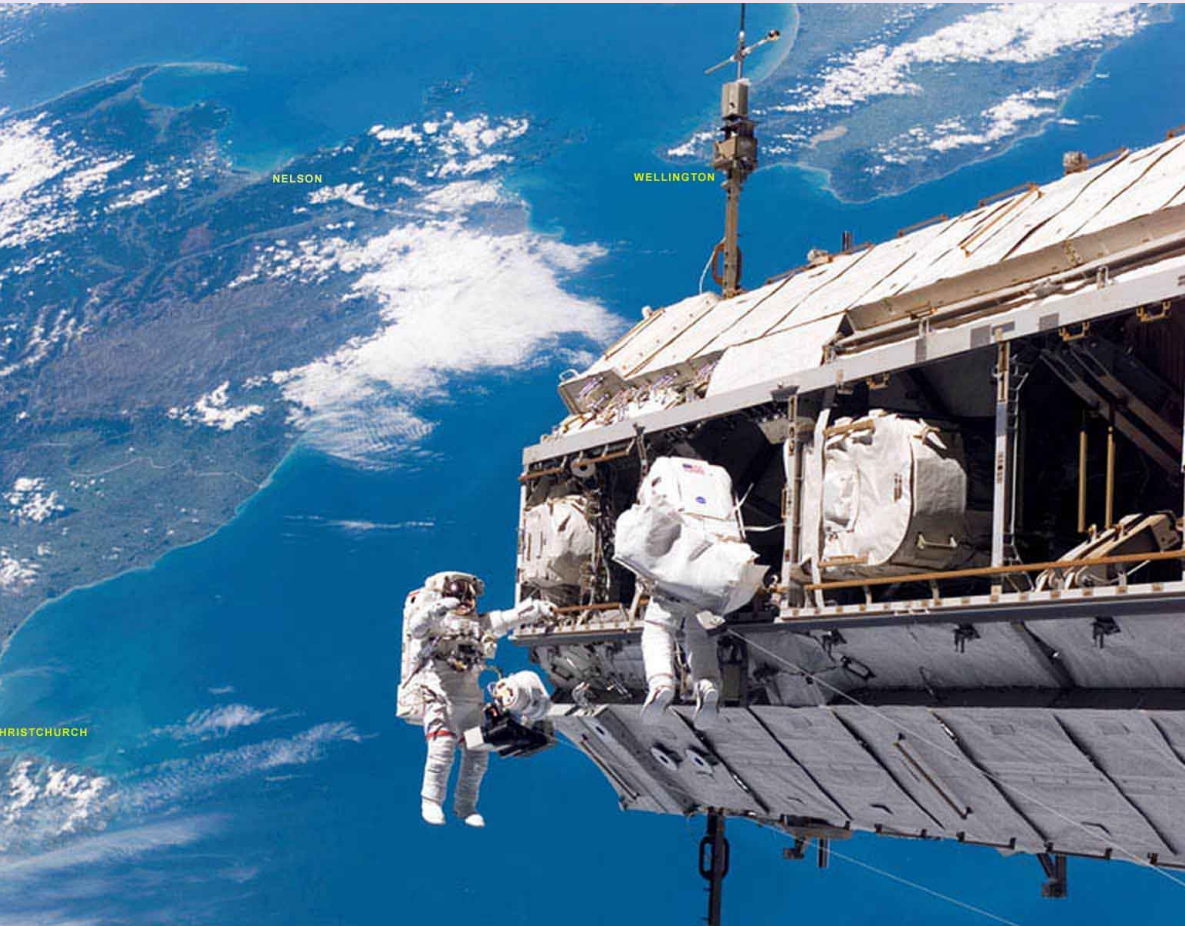
<https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/governance/system-assurance/all-of-government-portfolio-programme-and-project-assurance-framework/>



Swift Trust



Positive “world view”



- Effective project teams have members with a positive view of:
 - Their own ability
 - The project situation
 - Others in the team
 - The world that the project relates to.