Case Study – Major Resource Development and Production Firm

Project delivery below par

- A major Resources firm discovered a new source for their input material, in which the concentration of a contaminant was much higher than was typical.

- The source was attractive to develop if the contaminant could be removed.

- The firm decided to address this by undertaking a contaminant remediation project.

- The technology that was selected for the project was established, but relatively unproven for this purpose at that time.

- The project did not perform as expected, experiencing significant cost growth and schedule over-run throughout its development and execution cycle.

- Helmsman were engaged to conduct a post implementation review on the project and identify systemic root cause factors leading to underperformance of projects.

What were the challenges?

- **Outcome insufficiently defined**: The project's success was defined technically which both narrowed and complicated the project. This masked the need for system-wide, non-technical requirements and the required focus on business value was lost.

- **Complexity not understood**: Underestimating the project's complexity led to weak project controls to address limited integration, ambiguous assumptions, resource availability, and slippage.

- **No accountability and ownership model**: The project lacked clearly defined responsibilities, formal oversight, and had frequent personnel changes. As a result, the issues above were never effectively addressed.

What changes were proposed?

- **Start with a clear outcome**: every future project now conducts outcome framing early in the development cycle. The fully-defined outcome is then used to identify conditions for success and key decision points.

- **Set up for Success**: a structured complexity assessment framework is used to understand complexity and set projects up for success with fit-for-purpose controls (e.g. governance, risk management, assurance, delivery approach).

- **Pin down accountabilities:** clear decision rights, accountabilities, and responsibilities are set. A Project Lead and team suited to the scale and complexity of each project is appointed and provided with support.

What was achieved?

- An end-to-end roadmap for projects was developed and rolled out as a standard for all future projects that enforced governance and gate disciplines.

- Tracking of subsequent projects against the lessons of the contaminant remediation project has shown significant improvement in overall project delivery performance.