

EXECUTIVE DIAGNOSIS

The Failure Your Dashboard Does Not Show

The system went live. The project closed. The old work never stopped.

The software is stable. The migration succeeded. Training completion is high. Usage statistics are positive. The programme is closed and the steering committee has moved on.

Six months later, people are still reconciling reports in Excel. A support team has quietly become part of the operating process. Important cases leave the system when the standard workflow does not fit. Managers check the new dashboard against information they trust more. Benefits expected in the business case have become harder to demonstrate.

None of this necessarily appears as an IT failure.

THE HIDDEN CONDITION

The User Acceptance Gap is the distance between having a functioning system and having a system that has become a reliable part of how the organisation actually performs its work.

Why CIOs should care

Weak acceptance is not a soft problem. It shows up as unreliable management information, permanent parallel work, support demand that never falls, benefit leakage, shadow systems and operational risk. The project can be technically successful while the investment is still failing economically.

THE CIO QUESTION

What has actually stopped since your last major implementation?

If the answer is “nothing”, the organisation may be paying for the new operating model and the old one at the same time.

A BETTER DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Go-Live Is Only the First of Four Outcomes

Implementations produce outcomes at four levels. Most governance is strongest at the first. Most business cases depend on the fourth.

1	TECHNICAL SUCCESS Does the system work within agreed parameters? Necessary. Contracted. Usually measured well.
2	OPERATIONAL SUCCESS Can people perform real work in it, including exceptions and pressure? Possible only when the solution fits the work.
3	BEHAVIOURAL SUCCESS Do people actually work in the intended way? Visible in behaviour, not in training attendance.
4	ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS Does the promised value appear? Better decisions, shorter cycles, fewer errors, less low-value work.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Each level enables the next. None guarantees it.

Ask at your next steering committee

Which of these four outcomes are we currently reporting — and which ones are we assuming?

A programme can be green at technical delivery and red at organisational value. If the governance pack cannot distinguish those conditions, it cannot manage the investment after go-live.

READ THE BEHAVIOUR, NOT THE LOGIN COUNT

A System Can Be “Used” Without Being Adopted

Non-adoption is rarely refusal. It appears as recognisable behaviour. Four forms are particularly dangerous because conventional usage statistics can make all of them look healthy.

CEREMONIAL USE

People enter exactly what is mandatory. The substance of the work remains elsewhere.

Evidence to look for: Look for activity clustering before deadlines and an absence of voluntary detail.

DISPLACED USE

The real work happens outside the platform and is entered afterwards.

Evidence to look for: Measure the time between the event and the record.

PARTIAL USE

Standard cases stay in the system; exceptions, escalations and difficult work leave it.

Evidence to look for: Follow the cases that do not fit the happy path.

PROXY USE

One person updates the system for colleagues whose own work has not changed.

Evidence to look for: Compare records with who actually performed the work and made the decision.

WHAT USAGE STATISTICS MISS

Login frequency cannot distinguish between any of these four conditions.

A more useful adoption question

What would our adoption numbers look like if we measured behaviour rather than access?

The purpose of measurement is not to prove that the system is being used. It is to discover whether the behaviours on which the business case depends are actually happening.

WHY EXPERIENCED ORGANISATIONS STILL GET SURPRISED

Eight Failure Patterns That Keep Reappearing

These patterns are rarely the result of incompetent people making obviously bad decisions. They are usually locally rational choices whose costs appear later, somewhere else, and are paid by somebody else.

01 The solution nobody asked for Technology before problem.	02 The system built around the process map Designed work instead of real work.
03 Involvement without influence Users participate after important decisions have closed.	04 Training as the answer to everything A learning intervention for a non-learning problem.
05 The field that exists for the report Data is demanded where the right answer cannot yet be known.	06 The mandatory system that manufactures workarounds Compliance rises while work moves elsewhere.
07 The forgotten middle manager Managers are treated as communication channels rather than users.	08 The standard configuration Product limitations quietly become organisational policy.

THE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATION

You do not need eight new workstreams. You need a small number of better questions asked before the decisions become expensive to reverse.

The earliest signal is usually cheap

If no one can describe the real exceptions, if user involvement cannot point to a decision it changed, or if refresher training is proposed before the cause of weak adoption is known, the project is already producing evidence. The question is whether governance is set up to read it.

RESISTANCE IS EVIDENCE

Before You Call It Resistance, Diagnose It

A DISCIPLINE WORTH ADOPTING

A user acceptance problem must never be explained before it has been investigated.

The first explanation offered for weak adoption is often “people resist change”. Sometimes that is true. But the explanation is dangerous because it can end the investigation just when the organisation most needs to know whether the solution, process or governance is wrong.

Five questions separate the causes

DIMENSION	THE QUESTION	A “NO” POINTS TO
ABILITY	Can this person perform the task in this system, under real conditions?	Capability, support or design.
WORKABILITY	Does the required way of working fit actual work, including exceptions?	Process or product redesign.
VALUE	Does this person gain anything from doing it properly, within a horizon they care about?	Benefit and burden distribution.
TRUST	Does this person trust the system, the data and the organisation?	Locate which trust is weak; the remedies differ.
ALIGNMENT	Does correct use conflict with something this person is measured on?	Governance. Project-level persuasion will not fix it.

Training directly addresses only one of the five.

If the problem is workability, value, trust or alignment, more communication and more training can make the project busier without making the system more acceptable.

THE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

ACCEPT: Six Disciplines That Connect Delivery to Value

ACCEPT does not replace project management, product management or change management. It connects the decisions between them that determine whether an investment becomes part of real work.

A	ALIGN value, expectations and ownership Make the problem, expected value, burdens, trade-offs and decision rights explicit.
C	CO-DESIGN the solution with users Study real work and let evidence influence the decisions before they close.
C	CREATE confidence and capability Prepare people for actual work, including exceptions, mistakes and recovery.
E	ENABLE the working environment Align roles, policy, capacity, data, devices, integrations and management expectations.
P	PILOT learn and adapt Test assumptions in practice and retain authority to change the solution.
T	TRACK adoption and sustain use Measure behaviour, workarounds and value after go-live, and act on what the evidence reveals.

THE POINT OF THE FRAMEWORK

Acceptance is not a workstream around the technical project. It is a property of the whole implementation.

The six disciplines deliberately span strategy, design, capability, operating environment, learning and post-go-live governance — because failures occur in the gaps between those domains.

NO NEW COMMITTEE REQUIRED

Six Questions to Add to Governance

The highest-value acceptance controls are questions attached to decision points that already exist. They add discipline without adding another governance layer.

BEFORE SOLUTION SELECTION	What is the problem, how large is it, and what would we do if this product did not exist?
BEFORE REQUIREMENTS FREEZE	Who has watched the work being performed on a bad day — and what did they find that the process map did not show?
BEFORE DESIGN CLOSES	Which decisions are genuinely still open to user influence?
BEFORE CONFIGURATION FREEZE	Which product limitations have operational consequences — and who has accepted those consequences?
BEFORE GO-LIVE	What happens when the standard path does not fit? Is that route inside the system or outside it?
90 DAYS AFTER GO-LIVE	What old process, tool or workaround has actually stopped?

WHY THIS WORKS

The cost of asking these questions is measured in minutes. The cost of discovering the answers after the decisions close is usually measured in months.

One more question for the CIO

Who still has the authority and budget to change the solution after the project closes?

If the answer is “nobody”, post-go-live evidence can be visible, valid and impossible to act on.

USE THIS ON ONE LIVE OR RECENT IMPLEMENTATION

The 30-Minute Acceptance Gap Review

Answer each question with Yes, No or Unknown. Do not average across the organisation: answer for the roles on which the business case depends most.

#	QUESTION	Y / N / ?
1	Can we name the three to six user behaviours the business case depends on?	_____
2	Do we know when work is entered relative to when it actually happens?	_____
3	Do we know what users do when the standard path does not fit?	_____
4	Can we identify which previous tools, reports or routines have genuinely stopped?	_____
5	Do support tickets tell us what users are trying to accomplish — not only which component failed?	_____
6	Do we know which roles carry additional effort so another role gains a benefit?	_____
7	Can users point to examples where reported problems caused the product or process to change?	_____
8	Is somebody still accountable for adoption evidence after project closure?	_____
9	Can management information from the new system be used without reconciliation against another source?	_____
10	Can we name the person authorised to reopen a design decision when post-go-live evidence shows it was wrong?	_____

8–10 YES**Actively governed**

Your implementation is probably being governed for acceptance, not only delivery.

5–7 YES**Material risk**

Acceptance risk may be hidden behind positive delivery indicators.

0–4 YES**Business case exposed**

The investment depends on behaviours you are currently not governing.

This is a management prompt, not a validated diagnostic instrument. Its purpose is to expose questions your normal project reporting may not be answering.

CONTINUE THE DIAGNOSIS

If Your Project Dashboard Says Green, Find Out What It Cannot See

The problem is not that IT projects ignore users.

The harder problem is that the decisions that determine acceptance are distributed across strategy, requirements, design, process, capability, data, support, management and governance. By the time “adoption” becomes a visible issue, many of those decisions are expensive to reopen.

BUILT TO BE USED

Why People Work Around the Systems You Build

Built to Be Used is written for CIOs, IT directors, programme leaders, business sponsors, product owners and implementation professionals who are accountable not merely for whether a system was delivered, but for whether the investment produces value.

Inside the book

27 CHAPTERS

Diagnosis, design, capability, rollout, measurement, AI and recovery of troubled implementations.

THE ACCEPT FRAMEWORK

A practical management model spanning the implementation lifecycle.

9 WORKING INSTRUMENTS

Observation, readiness, acceptance risk, ownership, pilot, hypercare and adoption diagnosis.

A practical promise

The techniques in the book are designed to fit inside normal implementation work. The objective is not another methodology around the project. It is better evidence and better decisions at the points where acceptance risk is created.

DISCOVER BUILT TO BE USED

Turn implementation evidence into better management decisions.

[Get your copy of the book here](#) • Eric Sleenckx



A final question: *When your next implementation goes green, will you know whether the work actually changed?*

Built to Be Used

Why People Work Around
the Systems You Build



Eric Sleenkx