

# Preface

I originally published *Why New Systems Fail* in February 2009. For a variety of reasons, I felt that the time was right for the book. Having worked on so many poorly conceived and terribly run projects in my career, it was painfully clear to me that there was something fundamentally wrong with most organizations' attempts to implement enterprise systems. In more than a decade of working on different IT projects in different countries and industries, I almost invariably saw the same outcome each time: some type of IT project failure.

However, in a way, the title was a bit of a misnomer. The book referenced systems that were, for the most part, actually very mature; they were only “new” to the organizations implementing them. By way of contrast, social networking is truly new. It is a relatively recent phenomenon with a corresponding lack of implementation methodologies and examples from which to learn. A high failure rate on these types of projects can be understood, if not expected, at least for the near future.

Projects involving organizations' implementation of “replacement” systems utilized applications and methodologies that have, in large part, been in existence for more than 20 years—an eternity in the world of technology. Many enterprise system implementations failed despite the presence of many attributes conducive to success: generous IT budgets, relatively mature applications, consulting firms with significant expertise, and thousands of previous projects to serve as examples and cautionary tales. Yet most of these projects continued to fail.

Against this backdrop, I could no longer claim that I just had a string of bad luck as a consultant. Something was broken, and I wanted to see if I could write a jargon-free, generally well-received book demystifying a process plagued by a 60 percent failure rate. While the first edition was certainly not perfect, I believe that I succeeded in that regard.

Since I began writing the first edition in the summer of 2008, much has happened that makes a revised edition of the book timely. For one, IT budgets have continued to decrease in response to the financial crisis and global recession. Many organizations have moved way beyond trimming the fat; some have cut into the bone. Organizations face new IT challenges, in particular doing even more with fewer financial and human resources. This

revised edition addresses these challenges to a greater extent than did the first.

There have also been many changes, developments, and advancements in the software world. It is anything but a stable place. Software as a service (SaaS) and open source software (OSS) have continued to gain footing and no longer can be considered on the fringe. This revised edition gives more attention to these topics. Chapter 4, formerly titled “The Make, Buy, or Rent Decision,” has been significantly reworked in light of these changes. Now titled “The Replacement System,” this chapter expands upon the options available to organizations intent on replacing their legacy systems and enhancing their use of different technologies.

Chapter 20 has been enhanced as well. Formerly titled “Build in a Margin for Error,” it now focuses more broadly on “Contingency Planning.” I have outlined several other ways for organizations to minimize risk with their new systems.

As a result of the recession, many software vendors have become creative in attempting to enhance future revenue streams. A few have attempted to extract additional maintenance fees from their clients. I've added content that will provide additional options for cash-strapped organizations looking to minimize these costs.

On a different level, I admittedly wrote the first edition in a bit of a bubble. I have since stepped out of it. This revised edition incorporates valuable content from many of the articles, blogs, and books that I have read over the past year. This book is considerably richer for the contacts I have made since the book's initial publication. I have had many intriguing conversations with industry experts, practitioners, and academics who have given me a more rounded perspective on many subjects, including project management and organizations' adoption of different technologies.

I have also removed the majority of Wikipedia citations and replaced them with ones from physical books, e-books, well-regarded blogs, and magazine articles. I have reorganized a good bit of the content, placing a few sections in more natural places. For the sake of easy reference, the book now contains a glossary of commonly used terms.

On an editorial level, there are two groups of changes. Despite my best efforts, an uncomfortable number of errors snuck past my team of editors and my own eyes back in February 2009. (Note that I define “uncomfortable” as anything greater than zero.) Although they did not undermine the book's central tenets, I have corrected the transposed words, minor omissions, and missing prepositions.

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This revised edition clarifies some subjects that, while not previously confusing, could have been articulated better in its initial publication. In my defense, I quote Leonardo da Vinci: “Art is never finished, only abandoned.”

The revised edition is more current and better written than its predecessor, but one thing has *not* changed: my sense of humor. Case in point: comparing myself to da Vinci in this Preface.

Phil Simon  
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