



Don't drop the ball

The Mentor Guide to guaranteed
program management success.



Introduction

The Mentor Guide to guaranteed program management success.

Businesses operate in a rapidly changing climate of uncertainty.

Yet, one thing is certain.

The pressure to successfully execute business-critical programs is greater than ever.

Failure is unthinkable. Get it wrong and you and your business may never recover.

Some of these scenarios may be familiar:

- Your program is off-track, even though it's been reshaped more than once
- You have fresh programs to run that simply have to work
- Your team could be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the new challenges they face
- Recent program execution performance has been "less than ideal"
- Supplier/partner performance difficulties occurred during the pandemic

So, let us ask you this:

"What would you do if you just had to make your next strategic program work?"

A really tough question to ask - but one this guide will help you answer.

We've applied the learnings, from decades of experience in strategic program management, to pinpoint what guarantees success - today.

Read on and you'll discover:

- Why the pressure is on to deliver more - better and faster
- Why programs miss the mark over-and-over again - with shocking ease
- The 6 balls you just can't afford to drop when running **any** program
- How you can rapidly get relief from firefighting and crisis management

We hope you find our guide thought-provoking, practical and, above all, worthwhile.



David Hilliard
Chief Executive

David is Founder and Chief Executive of Mentor. Trusted hard-core specialist with broad skills on strategy execution.



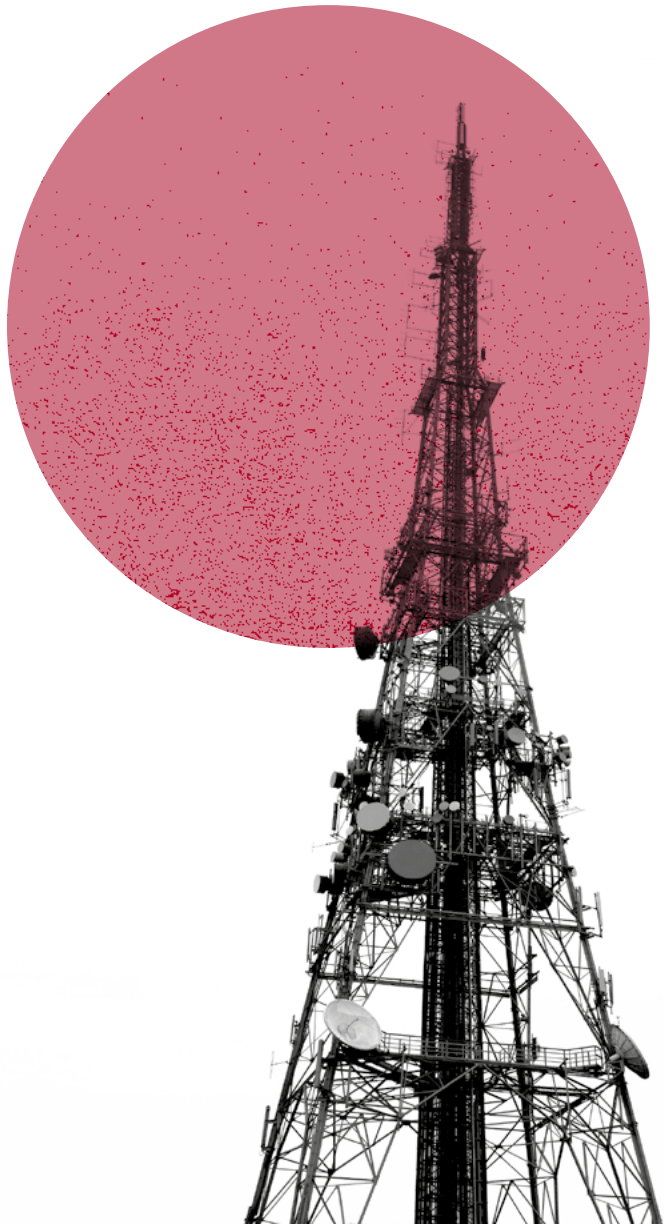
Aga Domel
Customer Project Manager

A hands-on project manager with a wealth of experience across a range of transformation programs.



Mike Hosie
Partner

Mike is an experienced program delivery expert, focussing on the successful delivery of complex-transformation programs.



The stakes are higher than ever for successful program execution in telecoms.

Failure is not an option.

Pre-pandemic, a lot of companies were running business-critical programs – with high expectations.

When the pandemic struck, most businesses had no option but to go through a process of “ruthless” reprioritisation. Deciding what was important, what to cancel, what could wait.

For some companies, this meant changed priorities. More urgency and intensity on things like Fibre rollouts, 5G Network Deployment, Small Cells, Billing Systems – and so on.

Now the time has come to grit teeth and rip the plaster off. This is not a time for baby steps.

The pandemic crisis kicked off a new generation of “must-not-fail” transformation programs. In many cases, they are still in train but need to be completed.

These programs are at the heart of a business’s ability to deliver a brilliant customer experience that keeps it ahead of its competitors.

Failing to drive success on business-critical programs is not an option. The future existence of a company could well be at stake.

The pressure to deliver – faster and better – is more intense than ever.

Yet, consider this also:

We know the majority of strategic programs fall well short of their original objectives. Bent Flyvbjerg and Dan Gardner's research in their excellent book "How Big Things Get Done" reveals that only 8.5% of programs come in on time – and meet their budget, with less than 1% coming anywhere close to delivering their planned benefits. Some just end up in the boneyard having delivered no value whatsoever.

But let's not split hairs over what the exact figures are. We all know the number is far too high.

Why?

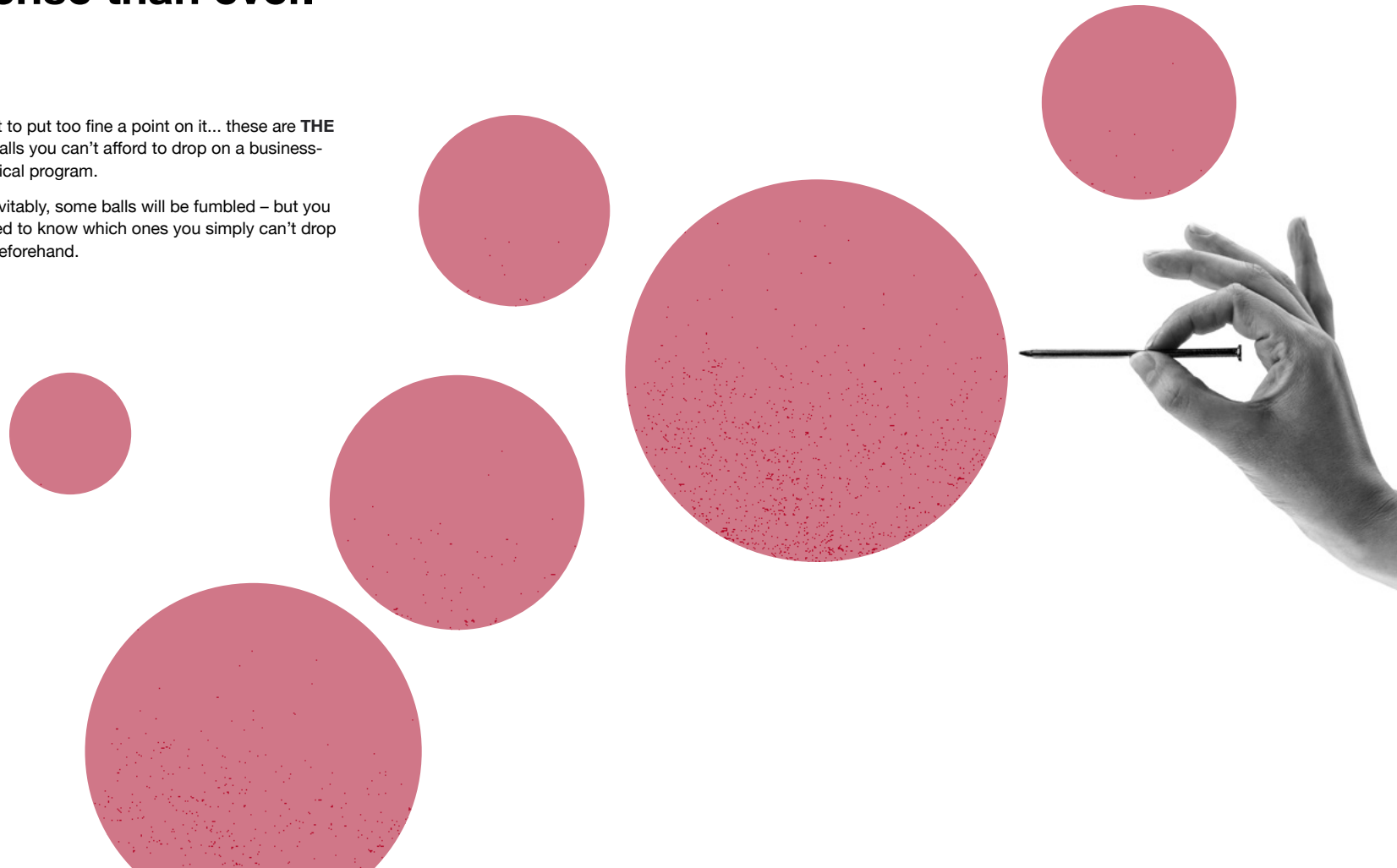
Because companies don't deal effectively with the 6 "bone-crushing" factors that send programs into a terminal nosedive – on autopilot.

These businesses seem to have an unlimited ability to hit unforced errors.

The 6 bone-crushers are: misalignment, ineffective program organisations, naïve program plans, poor supplier management, weak dependencies and... disruptive culture.

Not to put too fine a point on it... these are **THE** 6 balls you can't afford to drop on a business-critical program.

Inevitably, some balls will be fumbled – but you need to know which ones you simply can't drop – beforehand.





How do we know you can't afford to drop these balls?

It's simple.

We have convincing proof from over 100 transformation programs we've rescued over the years. And in each, all 6 balls were dropped.

Program failure was designed-in, from the start.

As if companies don't pay enough tax already, this means over 100 of them paid yet another tax – "program execution tax". Dropping the ball for no reason that makes any sense.

It was simply a matter of time before these programs departed for the great bone yard in the sky. You just can't get away with weak foundations.

Just as it takes time for problems to surface with building foundations, business-critical programs are no different.

You can be happily sailing along for many months with no sign of any problem – and then the landmines start going off.

Randomly and without warning.

This pattern is mirrored across different industry sectors – and it's so self-evident, it's surprising anyone wants to squabble about it.

Why do companies drop the ball?

At least one of these factors is always at play – complacency, arrogance, ignorance, naivete – usually coupled with an unshakable belief – that program flameouts only happen to "other people". A good sign their minds are not on the job.

You can fix ignorance with education – but it's far more difficult to deal with complacency and naivete.

Keeping the balls under control guarantees a program's success.

The good news is when you actually do grasp the nettle and start to put programs right, with a proven approach - you get success every time. No problem.

We decided to rewrite the operating system for program execution with insights we pulled together from over 100 business-critical programs we've run. You can only improve a typical operating system by carrying out an honest appraisal of its flaws, imperfections, negative features and practices.

This is why we created **The MentorBlueprint** - a new, proprietary execution system - a rich fusion of accumulated wisdom and pragmatic know-how.

We believe it's the foundation for program success in every company. Safe, easy to follow and delivering big benefits for clients.

Saving masses of time, it makes sure clients can deliver their programs with absolute certainty.

Without dropping any balls.

This seems very basic, doesn't it? You've heard it all before - or something like it. It sounds like common sense.

Yet, most companies do not get these basics right. Or, if they do get them right once, **they can't sustain their success in the longer term.**

Be aware: what's required for program success - **and** "mastering the intricacies" of fitting together what's required for program success - are two different things.

Each has a dramatically different impact on program results.

Most CEOs are aware of the 6 balls, but many tackle them in the wrong order - or only partially.

Often, they will focus on the program plan, before getting executive alignment. Then focus on major supplier negotiations - but take little notice of complex dependency issues with their suppliers.

And, bizarrely, many CEOs completely sidestep fundamental performance blockers on program organisation.

They make these mistakes and wonder why they have so much chaos, uncertainty and volatility on a program that's treading water. Worse, this chaos leads to even more chaos.

Unfortunately, it's often the least competent individuals who are the most confident.

Yet, you can set up a winning streak, if you fire up The MentorBlueprint, where we can quickly and crisply evaluate how your program stacks up against all 6 factors.

Wouldn't it be smart to find out what shape your program is in before you start?

The MentorBlueprint





“What would I do if I just had to make my next program work?”

Hero or Zero?

So, the race to digitally transform your business is on. Competitors have sharpened their axes.

You can't risk chasing down the same old rabbit tracks again. Delay or failure is unthinkable.

How should you approach the execution task – in a world far less tolerant of waste, inefficiency and mediocre performances?

You could start by asking:

“What would I do if I couldn't afford to screw up. What if I only get one shot at it and if I don't get it absolutely right, it would quite literally, destroy my career?”

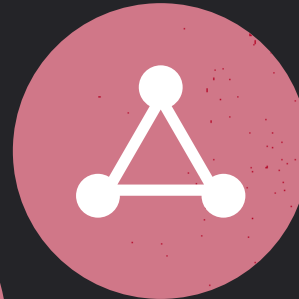
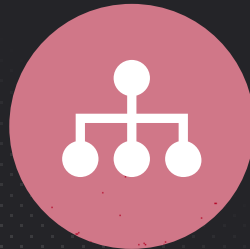
More people should try thinking like that sometime... as if your career actually depends on the success of your next program. You have a much better chance of succeeding – and being a hero - if you think this way.

Can you put yourself in that frame of mind?

Well, I did, and I came to a number of conclusions, and I'd like you to reason along with me for a few minutes.

Let me give you a flavour of what I think you'd do in the 6 areas to make sure you were a hero. You wouldn't want to butcher this opportunity, would you?

The six balls



Misalignment

Without alignment, it's over.

Everything falls apart, if a leader doesn't get their team united around the programs' objectives. The truth is: people put self-interests ahead of team interests – and prioritise winning parochial skirmishes ahead of winning championships.

Building alignment is the essential task in front of you.

So, I bet you would NOT treat the job of “activating” the leadership and program teams as casually as you know others do. Certainly, not if your career depended on it.

You know most conflicts are over tactics – who is going to do what, by when and how? This is why you wouldn't delegate the job of bringing the wider program team on board to anyone else. You'd be scared to death the clarity of your message would be so watered-down, it wouldn't get through.

You wouldn't risk any confusion by cutting corners on this. Absolutely not.

And you're experienced enough to know while four or five executives saying “we're aligned” is a good start – on its own, it's an empty gesture. A long way short of the powerful management coalition you'll need to make sure you succeed.

If you weren't just play-acting – and your career really was on the line - you would definitely also run a rigorous “stress-test” to see whether your team was fully aligned and committed.

Why would you take a chance on that?



Program plan

Nothing happens by accident.



If you know most programs fail because they haven't been planned properly. And your career might vanish overnight, if your program joins the "70% Club" – you would find out exactly what you had to do – and by when.

What's more, you would make sure your program plan was a model of excellence.

You'd prepare a detailed work breakdown structure (WBS) – because it contains all the work that must be understood, decomposed, estimated, scheduled and budgeted.

Absolutely, you would.

And because this is critical, you'd use planning metrics that were proven and accurate.

You'd use metrics from comparable company programs – to gauge how many people you'd need, what skills, how much the program would cost and how long it would take to deliver?

Categorically, you would not "wing it" by putting your faith in crude, superficially persuasive metrics. Not if you wanted to impress.

You already know if you don't track metrics or can't interpret them – at best, you risk misunderstanding problems. At worst, you risk not even noticing them.

And "not noticing" is a widespread malaise.

Certainly, if you wanted to be a real pro, you'd always be in a position to explain the story behind every number, wouldn't you? And there is a story behind every number.

If you couldn't, you'll learn the hard way. There's a huge difference between a shortcut – and cutting corners. By all means, take legitimate shortcuts – but don't be tempted to cut corners and commit the worst sin of all – flying "blind".

You'll never find a commercial airline pilot flying anywhere without instruments, would you? There's too much at stake. Yet, many companies choose to use "visual flight rules" only.

Great, as long as you can see clearly – no turbulence, storms or clouds around. But let's be frank, visual flight rules are hopeless for business-critical programs.

Program plan

You can't slogan your way to success.



BALL 1 2 3 4 5 6

Anyone who works in Technology will quickly “get” this. It’s the same the world over.

If you want to check how trustworthy the metrics are on any program, start by scrutinising the back-end of the development lifecycle. Look at the System Integration and Test activity – and then do a detailed drill-down on plans for cutover to operations.

These functions are at the back-end of the development lifecycle. Beyond doubt, looking at the back-end gives you the best “fudge-free” view of how good your metrics are. Are deliverables arriving when they should? How much rework was involved? Half-finished work is no use to SI&T and Operations. It’s there – and it works – or it doesn’t.

This is where many executives find out, the hard way, **they can’t “slogan” their way to success.** The metrics tell you, unambiguously, if there is poor performance upstream – and where.

How many replans (in total) have SI&T and Operations carried out to compensate for hold-ups by internal and external suppliers to the program? And for what reasons? More than three repetitions is not a good sign.

Are SI&T and Operations almost permanently re-planning – even though the development teams say their work is done?

Both functions – SI&T and Operations – are rich sources of unarguable evidence on whether program metrics are accurate – and how well they’ve stood up against the original predictions. More importantly, you’ll find out quickly if the program is stuck – and where to go to fix it.

Just imagine how many disasters could have been discovered before it was too late – like TSB billing system, Smart Metering rollout, Emergency Services Network – if management had only taken a fresh perspective.

Organisation

**No-one can whistle a symphony;
it takes a whole orchestra.**

Well, let's start with what you know, for sure. Program organisation plays a key part in the success – or failure – of any program. And you know the most cohesive team is always more certain of success.

From your own experience, you know business-as-usual dominates new programs, no matter how strategically important executives say they are.

In truth, you've lost count of the number of "gifted", but untested, Business Transformation Directors who arrive on the scene with great pomp and pageantry – and vanish in a cloud of dust in less than a year. Knocked around, discredited, confidence shattered – and achieving very little.

So, knowing all this, I bet you wouldn't allow your program organisation to be "shoehorned" into a functional structure, where it can be starved of resource and quietly strangled. Without too much difficulty,

Not if you wanted to do a great job, you wouldn't.

You definitely wouldn't attempt to run your program with time-sliced "representatives" who are fragmented across the business – where you'd be trying to coordinate what they were doing through dotted-line reporting. No good.

And you wouldn't even entertain the thought of appointing a Program Director with no line authority – a "coordinator" – to run the program, would you? Because they'd spend the bulk of their time figuring out how to handle concessions the functional organisation has asked for.

If you've ever wondered why a program misses its commitments, over and over again – you don't need to look much further than whether the "coordinator" is actually able to do their job.

How can anyone convince themselves this approach is, in any way, cohesive? Trying to run a business-critical program with "parts of people" spread around the organisation is a fast track to mediocrity.

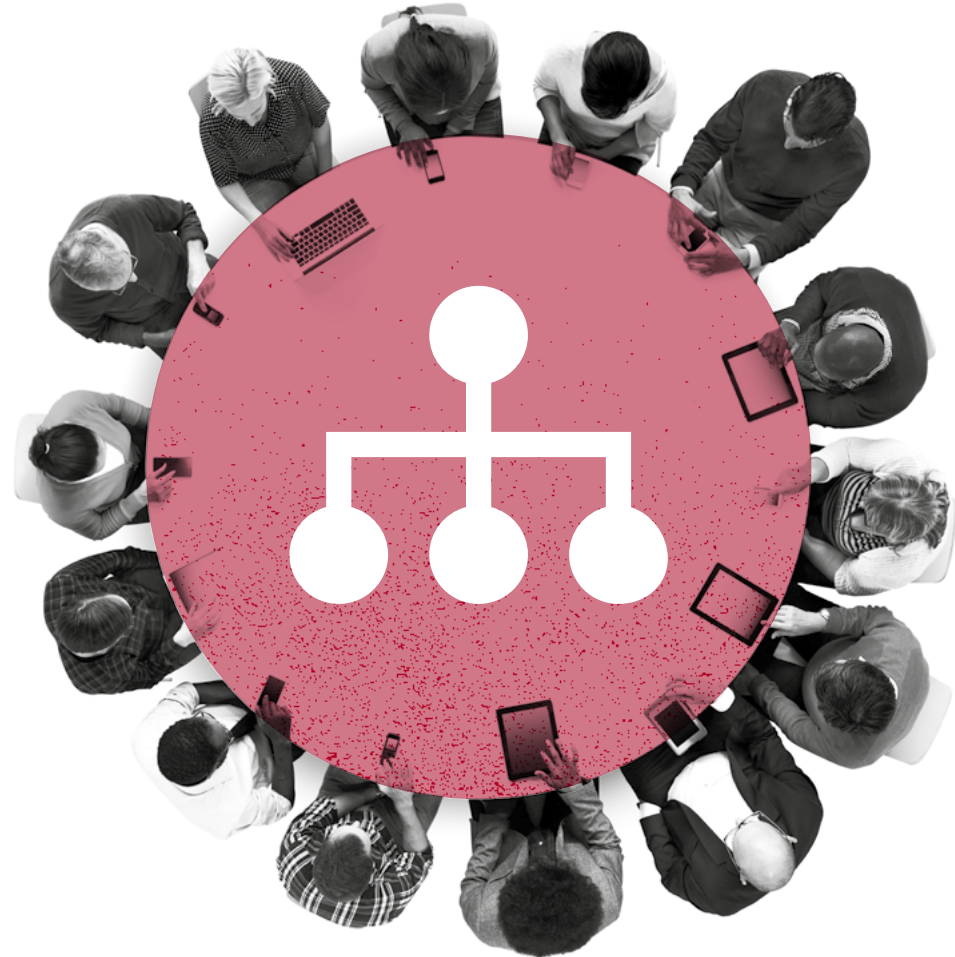
There's a good reason why so many countries have Special Forces to carry out unconventional military activities – Special Air Services, Navy Seals, and so on. Because some missions can't practically be executed by the regular forces – which were designed for more traditional

activities.

Special Forces tackle tough, out-of-the-ordinary challenges, need special skills and don't let anything get in their way. Above all, they are a cohesive team – focused on group results.

For best results, your business-critical program will need a cohesive, standalone team with its own full-time leader and dedicated resources to engineer a success story.

If you had to deliver a "must-not-fail" program, you'd make sure you gave your team the best possible chance of success.



Suppliers

It's not as easy as it looks.



BALL 1 2 3 4 5 6

Can you remember the last time your business ran a program that did not rely on software or hardware from one of the leading global players? Mostly, they're self-selecting these days - Ericsson, Nokia, AMDOCS, Netcracker - and so on.

So, let's say the hardware and software you've selected are first-rate and your company has made sound commercial and operational decisions.

Nevertheless, execution is crucial and you'll want to focus on where else the solution has been deployed - and what the results were? What was the setting? Was it comparable to your own business?

What about the vendor team? Have they implemented the solution in your geography before? How many of their people will you need - with what skills - and where will they come from?

If they're a successful vendor, management talent will probably be thinly spread - and the difference between the A team and the D team will vary significantly from geography to geography.

A few years ago, I asked a vendor Program Director to introduce me to the individuals who had allegedly worked on another account, like ours, in a different geography.

Anyone like to guess what happened?

From a team of 38 people, only two had worked on the previous program. The balance was made up of vendor staff and daily rate contractors, with no special skills, hired from the local market.

If you've got one shot at making your program work, you'll make sure you get full visibility of supplier plans. You'll make sure their workstreams are properly managed and you'll make sure their plans are fully integrated with your own.

Absolutely no blind spots.

You'll take manageable risks, of course, but not reckless ones. It's never a good idea to be a trailblazer in your circumstances, is it?

Dependencies

Everyone needs someone to lean on, and trust.

If nothing else attacks your execution plan, you can virtually guarantee dependencies will. It's the No. 1 blind spot in any program.

No program runs in isolation. Dependencies are inevitable. Every complex program plan relies on inputs from other programs and external suppliers.

So, what makes dependencies difficult? And what should you do about it?

You've seen programs where they've not been explicitly identified, and this lapse caused major problems and delays?

There's nothing worse than hearing a Program Manager blatantly trying to slide out from under their commitments, saying they can meet their dates "as long as somebody else does this by then – and if another group does something else by then also."

If you want to succeed, you'll make sure this doesn't happen to you.

You must force accountability where it belongs – and organise a proper system to capture

every dependency. And you'll make sure those dependencies are delivered to your program.

Remember, you are accountable for getting all the work done. Inside your program, outside your program – wherever. Not directly controlling the resource is not an acceptable defence. It never was.

You'll need a system for "placing" each dependency on a "supplier", then evaluating it and securing an offer which matches your requirement.

If there's a mismatch between your program's requirements and the offer, you'll need an escalation mechanism to get conflicts resolved. You can't allow anything to remain up in the air for more than 24 hours. And to avoid friction, everyone must understand the "balloon-will-go-up", if the problem is not fixed quickly.

There's no better way of reminding people your program is business-critical.

Seems a bit basic, doesn't it? Yet, you'd be appalled at how many dependencies are "placed" in vague, off-the-cuff, conversations.

If they're not missed entirely, they can be ill-defined, misunderstood and poorly executed – and this is another way dependencies drop through the net.



Culture

Being greater than the sum of your parts.

There's a lot more to culture than slogans, although many companies seem to love them. Yet, company values rarely match the way people behave in reality.

The truth is some teams add up to be greater than the sum of their parts, while others add up to be less. If you're working with good people, your performance will probably be better. Equally, if you work with a mediocre team, guess what?

Team culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet. We know when it's present and we also know when it's absent or toxic.

If the work setting is trust-based and people feel safe expressing views, that's a great start. Programs tend to perform better where there's trust, compared with a fear-based atmosphere.

If a business doesn't handle bad news well - and people are not confident in speaking out - teams push bad news down and remain silent about deteriorating problems, in case they are reprimanded, or thought of as losers.

Fear encourages people to distort and misrepresent facts and engage in all sorts of verbal gymnastics to obscure really serious issues. This is really unhelpful and it's one reason why problems can remain hidden from view for a long time.

And cover-ups are a huge drawback in a program setting, where prominence must be given to facts and evidence.

Most of program management is about structure, discipline, teamwork and problem-solving - and the culture must support an atmosphere that's conducive to all of these.

Programs are complex, ambiguous and volatile. They are even more difficult if people don't feel able to speak their minds - or are encouraged to pretend something has been done when it hasn't.

Plain speaking is fundamental.

If a team member hasn't completed an activity, they must feel able to say so, without fear of disapproval. If they don't know the answer to a question, they should simply say "I don't know, but I'll find out." That way, it's clear what the facts and intentions are.

Acting on even one "unfactual fact" or opinion, based on misleading information, causes massive confusion and wasted effort in a program team. And often causes expensive delays

So, if you've got one shot at getting your program right, your team must build a culture focused on preventing and resolving problems, - promoting clarity, positive relationships and, above all, cohesion. The most cohesive team always wins.



This time, failure isn't an option

**The MentorBlueprint is all about successful execution.
We know it works and we guarantee it.**

One condition though: it only works if there's clear commitment from the top.

You need to take everyone involved **along** with you to build a massive sense of confidence and belief.

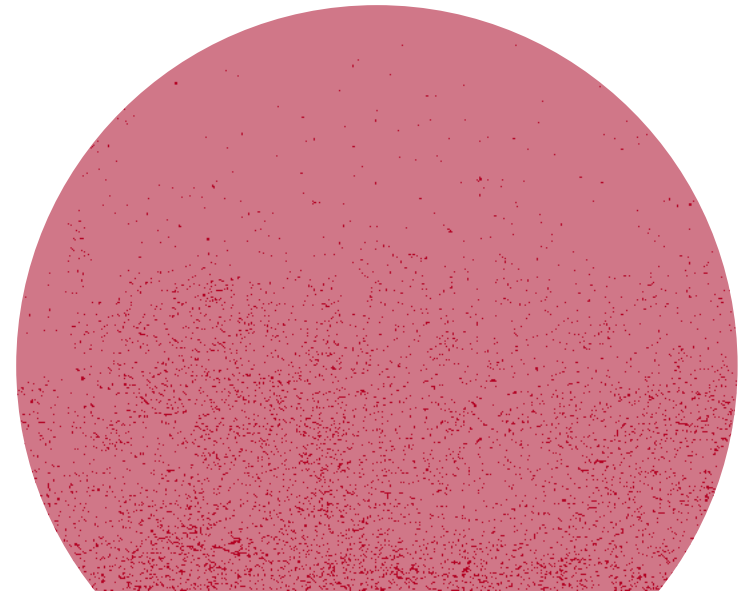
That way you create a winning team with a winning mentality.

Strong leadership, with The MentorBlueprint, guarantees you won't drop any of the 6 balls.

We can help you make it a reality.

Let's have a conversation to objectively assess whether you are dropping any of these balls or whether your strategic programs are on track.

Email: enquiries@mentoreurope.com



In summary

What would you do if you just had to make your next strategic program work?

Thanks for reading our Guide. Here's a summary of the key points needed to make your strategic program work.

Businesses are operating in a rapidly changing climate of uncertainty.

In the race to digitally transform operations, the pressure to deliver successful business-critical programs has never been more intense.

The pandemic forced many organisations to reshape and reset programs needed to make sure their businesses survived. Now it's about keeping ahead of competitors with streamlined operations and increased customer value through successful execution of business-critical programs.. You just have to get it right.

Your business can't afford delays, increased costs and reduced revenues from a program that just doesn't deliver.

Not to mention the personal toll all the instability means you have to soak up.

We have proof from over 100 transformation programs we've rescued over the years. They all have one thing in common. They dropped the 6 balls we talk about in our Guide.

Failure was designed-in from the start.

So how do you break this vicious cycle of let-down and frustration?

By taking decisive action now, you'll be well on the road to turning things around.

The solutions for achieving success.

For your strategic program to succeed, you just cannot drop any of the 6 balls.

Harness the structured approach of The MentorBlueprint – and there's not a chance you will.

The MentorBlueprint is well thought-out. It's a proven formula.

You'll create the solid foundations you need to escape the unstructured chaos that always goes with any program on its way to being "out for the count".

You'll infuse your team with confidence and belief – and build a winning mentality.

We firmly believe it's more relevant today, than ever.

Guaranteed results.

Work with us to apply The MentorBlueprint, and we'll guarantee your program's success.

- You'll launch on time, within budget and ahead of the competition
- You'll have total control of your strategic program, with no loss of focus on business as usual
- You'll accelerate time-to-revenue - and you'll enjoy greater cost efficiency
- Everyone involved will be motivated by working on a program where firefighting and crisis management are a thing of the past.

All of this will be great news for your company. And even better for you personally.

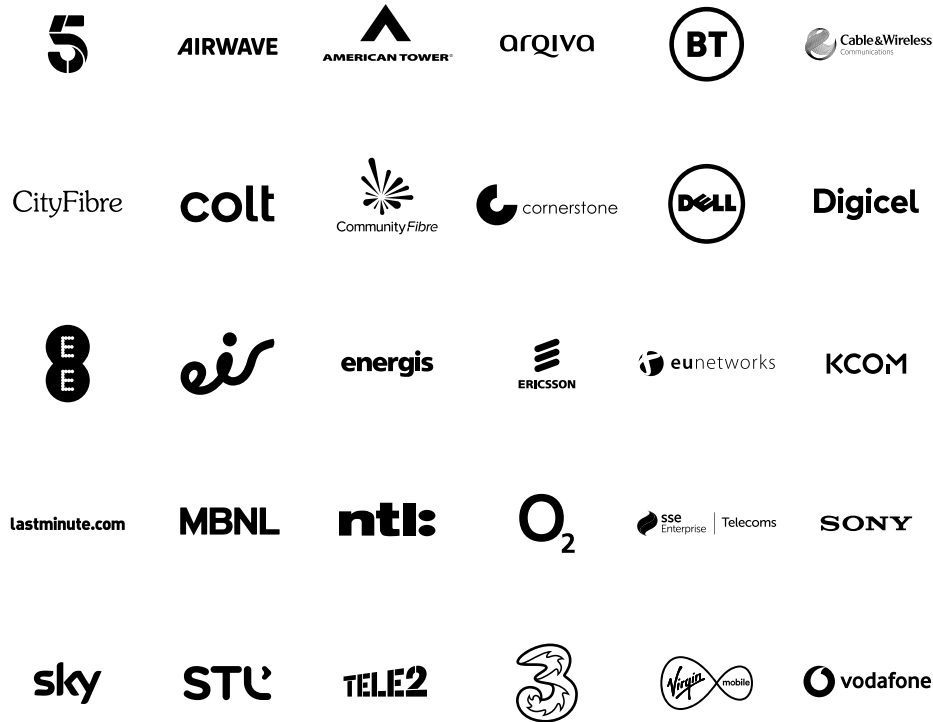
Just imagine the enormous relief you'll feel from knowing that the 6 balls are all within your grasp and your critical programs are under control. Schedule a call with us to give you peace of mind, email enquiries@mentoreurope.com

The 6 balls you can't afford to drop.

1. **ALIGNMENT** (Without alignment, it's over)
2. **PROGRAM PLANS** (Nothing happens by accident)
3. **ORGANISATION** (No one can whistle a symphony; it takes a whole orchestra)
4. **SUPPLIERS** (Managing them is not as easy as it looks)
5. **DEPENDENCIES** (Everyone needs someone to lean on, and trust)
6. **CULTURE** (Be greater than the sum of your parts.)

Our clients

Some of the clients we work with.



“The TMT market is awash with lots and lots of initiatives. Not many of the big ones execute properly - mostly because they don't start very well.

Derek McManus, former COO, Telefonica UK

“We did not appreciate the huge interdependencies between the different programs, and the fact that missed milestones in one could have significant consequences on other programs.

Paul Donovan, former Chief Executive, Arqiva

“Too many organisations underestimate operational requirements and execution. They look at massive strategic programs, critical to their success and just assume their organisation can deliver them. That is a massive gap in most organisations.

Jeff Dodds, former COO, Virgin Media

About Mentor

Mentor has three solid decades of experience in running difficult, business-critical programs in the UK and European telecoms markets. Breaking new ground by helping to create some of the first wave of Alt.net deployments, Mentor worked behind the scenes with most of the UK's infrastructure players.

Today, Mentor is helping mobile operators, fibre providers and infrastructure players to figure out how to respond to the huge opportunities presented by 4G densification and the move to 5G.

Specifically for:

- Mobile operators – crafting new design, deployment and IT schemes for fibre networks and optical solutions across their core and access networks
- Fibre providers - designing solutions that meet the unique architecture, operational and business case requirements of the mobile operators
- Infrastructure players, and their investors, as they look to earn new revenues from the opportunities presented by the move to 5G

With our strong industry relationships and independence – combined with deep design, operational and commercial experience – we will work with you and your team to provide the people, resources and expertise to get your business-critical program over the line – with certainty.

Want guaranteed program success?
email: enquiries@mentoreurope.com





Get in touch

Email David at david.hilliard@mentoreurope.com for an informal chat to understand our program management thinking and how you can ask different questions at your next board meeting to spot a program that is in trouble earlier.