Program Management – Key Success Factors

SKILLION
CASE STUDY

Program Management

Being a program manager is not easy. It can be pretty challenging at times. However, there are certain things that you can do to increase your chances of success. Applying Key Success Factors is a vital skill illustrated by the successful Server Based Gaming Program at Aristocrat.

As a Program Manager at Aristocrat in 2009, I led and coordinated the program Server Based Gaming. This was the world's first technology for the gaming industry and Aristocrats. The role included developing the overarching Program for SBG at Aristocrat, the product ready for market introduction, and the first installation in MGM Macau. I managed risks and issues and ensured that programs were delivered on time and within budget. I worked closely with Aristocrat management, our development team in Sweden, and our customer MGM in Macau. Such was the success that I was awarded Excellence in Program Execution for my part.

Aristocrat is one of the world's leading manufacturers of gd software. They supply prod manufacturersucts and services to some of the most well-known casinos around the globe. Aristocrat also has a strong presence in the online gaming market, with a range of popular games that can be played on desktop and mobile devices with a market capitalization of $14.34 Billion (Oct 2022).

Server Based Gaming (SBG) is a platform that enables casinos to offer a range of Aristocrat games on demand. SBG allows casino operators to choose which games to offer and when they want to provide them. This means that players can enjoy a wide selection of Aristocrat games on a machine of their choice and opens the possibility of new game forms. This keeps casinos fresh and exciting for both operators and players alike. In 2008 and 2009, the "hot" new technology showed signs of being the next big thing in gaming.

In 2008 Aristocrat invested $75m* to purchase the Server Based Gaming platform from Swedish company ACE Interactive AB. The challenge, therefore, is to offer a return on this investment to Aristocrats.

Charged with "the" SBG Program being loosely defined as "make SBG work" by the CEO was the basis of the charter. We began work in 2008.

The question, therefore, is, what quantifies success?

This is where KEY SUCCESS FACTORS (KSF's) come in. ThKSFsst step is to understand the business. How does Aristocrat make money from SBG and return the investment? These are the steps we followed:

They are working with subject matter experts in Aristocrat to define the assumptions. Assumptions include how many casinos are operating with Aristocrat products (850), how many would take SBG (137), and what the competition is. IGT was one of the main competitors to Aristocrat, and it was determined that they would not be able to launch SBG earlier than Aristocrat. How many units can each Casino install (100)? Over the ten years, the Program offers a top-level revenue of ($275m), but this displaces some Aristocrat products, but these are bought and paid for and would return similar or better support and service revenues.

From the above and through our analysis, including interviews with Aristocrat leadership (stakeholders), a few top levels KSFs can be determined:

- Demonstrate a positive business case in the first order, Revenues: $275m – $75m = $200m
- Demonstrate leadership and compete with rivals. See this article from 2008
- Begin the roll-out as soon as possible

At this point, Aristocrat had a Program Management Office (PMO), which provided leadership on Program methodologies, practices, and leadership. This was significant in helping the team "win the ear" of key staff at Aristocrat.

Going a little deeper in planning the initial steps, further KSF's follow:

- Demonstrate the first SBG products in an actual Casino environment ASAP
- Demonstrate positive user experience from players ASAP

With these defined, the project plans were created covering:

- Customer Trial at MGM
- Development project(s)
- Local Trial & Staging
- Field Testing

- Stakeholder Management within Aristocrat

One key factor (KSF) was having a willing and cooperative customer. In this case, we found MGM in Macau. They had a helpful floor manager and IT team ready to support the integration. It is always essential to realize the human component. The floor manager was keen to move his family from Macau back to Sydney, Australia, and one possibility for him was to work with Aristocrat and even be part of SBG. So he was motivated to help us get this up a running too. I remember, on one occasion,h em showed us his office and the list of VIPs who are "high r. These" can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars at the Casino. He would keep tabs on them if they came into the Casino and ensured that their needs were met, even if that meant getting a chair for them, more like the competitive Casino down the road just for them to sit on!

Another KSF was that the SBG system performed well on the floor. To put this in context, imagine a bed with hundreds of gaming machines and thousands of players across and massive base. The SBG system needs to have a compelling offering to attract and keep players playing. One of the features of SBG was that the player could select the games they wanted from a range; this was the hypothesis and needed to be tested in the field.

The trial was not without its issues. Pre-configuring, testing, shipping, staging, back-end customer system integration, floor placement, and installation. This project required some fundamental project management, and I remember being in a hot, smelly, dirty warehouse staging the system for days to ensure it would be stable on the floor.

One serious issue arose when we arrived on the floor to find all 8 SBG machines down and offline. This doesn't look good for a casino floor, and the MGM team was not happy to consider removing it. We eventually solved the issues, the system worked fine, and we coached the technical team on making repairs if needed.

The results were good but not great. Thriving as a Program and successful across multiple projects, the product was not ready as a business venture. There was not the uptake of players that was hoped. For MGM or any customer to be interested, they need to demonstrate an increase in revenues for SBG versus a stand-alone machine.

After I left Aristocrat, the MGM trial was concluded, and Aristocrat went to work developing the new game forms and other compelling features that would make SBG a success later.

Some more subtle keys to success or KSFs were there, developing relationships with key people and enrolling support both within the team and when needed outside. One example of this was the need to resolvechnical issues with the Swedish section of developers and havhaveem onsite in Macau. Also, ultimately people make decisions daily to support or not support the Program, and you always want them to be supportive, even if only emotionally. Building bridges and positive experiences with people and offering real value to people are all keys.

If you need a Program Manager to start a project or are considering doing so, please get in touch with us today to learn more.

(*) The numbers in the Case Study are illustrative only and not intended to be accurate.

Pete Cooper is a CEO and Program Manager with 20+ years of diverse experience as a Program Manager and eight years as a CEO. His career started as a design engineer and grew to the executive level. He has worked in various fields, including Software Development, AI/ML, Product Design Aviation, App development, RF design, Electronics Design, Mechanical Design, Telehealth, Semiconductors, IoT, and more.

Pete is a thought leader in applying Program Management methodology as a CEO. He has received recognition for overseeing complicated projects in various sectors. He holds an Engineering Degree, MBA, an Airline Pilot's Licence, and multiple Program Management Certifications, including FAIPM.

At Skillion, where Pete is the CEO, we pride ourselves on our ability to implement and educate Program Management woven into our customer projects. If you need more than just a technical solution but need it managed end to end, don't hesitate to get in touch with us today to learn more.

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