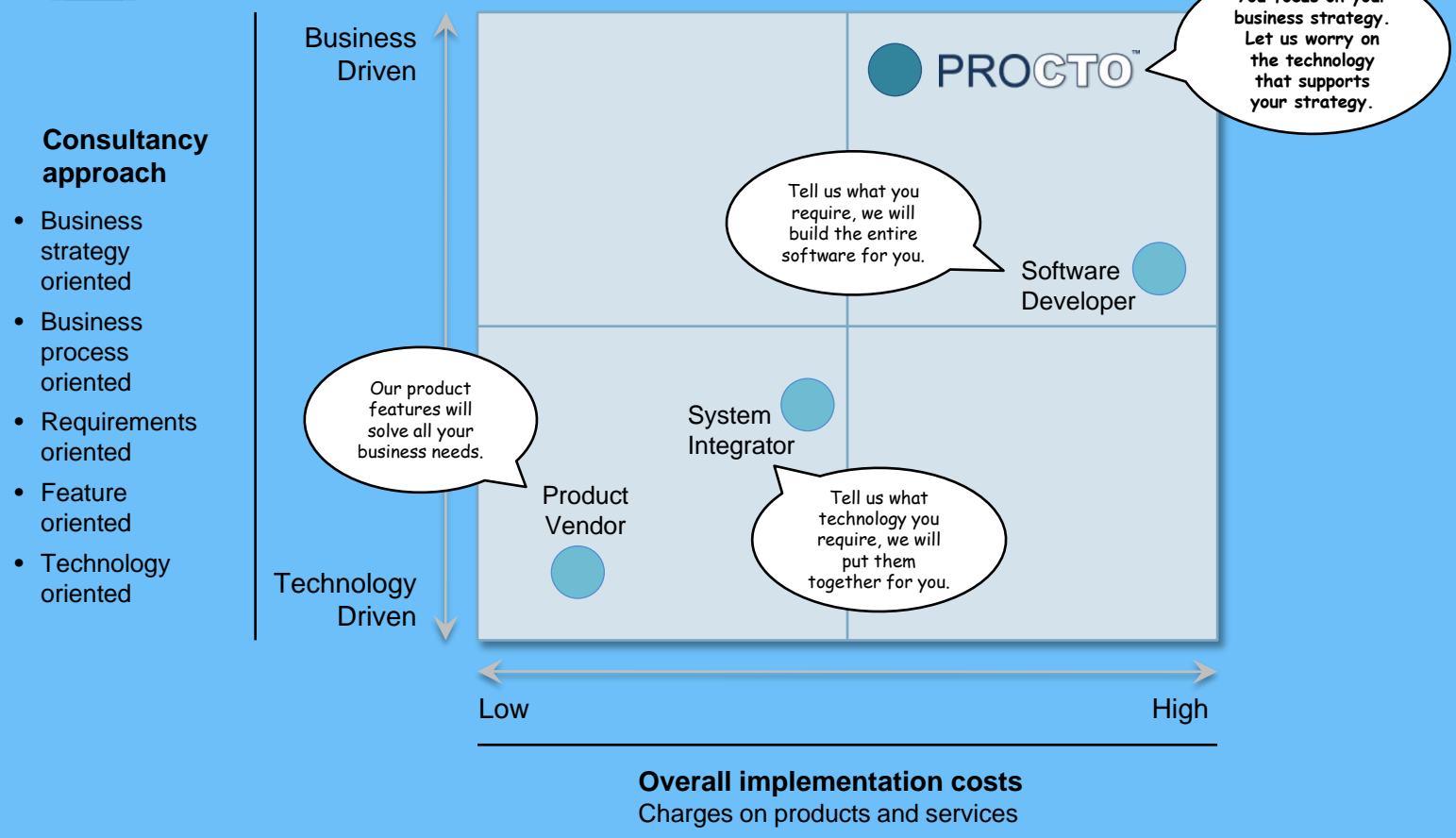


Understanding The Different Breeds Of Technology Specialists



- Consultancy approach**
- Business strategy oriented
 - Business process oriented
 - Requirements oriented
 - Feature oriented
 - Technology oriented

1. Product Vendors: These are typically sales consultants from the vendor company, or their implementation or reseller partners. They are very technology driven and feature oriented. They will demonstrate to you how their product can fulfill all your business requirements, though its effectiveness in fulfilling your business needs is often questionable, and you will also risk paying more for unnecessary features, as they are very unlikely to provide you alternative options from other vendors. Nonetheless, this is by far the cheapest way of implementing technology solution.

- Pros: Low overall implementation costs.
Cons: Risk getting unsuitable solution and paying more unnecessarily.

2. System Integrators: These are typically technical consultants with good knowledge in putting various technology pieces together. If you know what are the bits and pieces of technology that you require, they are able to put them together to make them work consistently. This provides you a wider options and flexibility on technology selections. Similar as product vendor, whether how effective is the integrated technology in fulfilling your business needs is questionable.

- Pros: Better flexibility on technology selections.
Cons: Need to know the best technology for your business.

3. Software Developers: These are also referred as "software house" that specialize in creating custom built software technology. They will typically ask what are your requirements or features that you would like to have on your software. The good

thing is they will deliver you a technology solution that is uniquely yours as per your exact specification. But unless you are very sure about the features that you want, along with their effectiveness to support your business, and put them down into a detailed specification, otherwise they will not work well with you as they don't particularly enjoy customers who keep changing their requirements, thus posing a greater risk to you. As they typically work on time and material contract, the implementation costs can go very steep depends on the project duration.

- Pros: Get a unique solution tailored to your exact needs.
Cons: High overall implementation costs and greater development risk.

4. Procto: We are very business driven in the sense that we will first understand your business vision, goals, problems and issues, and then analyze opportunity for improving your business process or innovate your business model. We will then represent your best interests to evaluate the technology and service provider that suit your business needs, and help you to implement the technology on-time and within budget. As we emphasize a lot on proper planning to give you more options, thus it often takes a bit more time before you can see the final solution. We typically cost a lot less than software developer, as we seldom recommend full custom built solution, unless it is part of your business objective. As a whole, you will get a solution that really works for your business in the most cost effective manner.

- Pros: Better guarantee on suitable and cost effective solution.
Cons: Takes a bit more time before seeing the final solution.

Questions To Ask Your Technology Specialist

Question to Ask	Why You Should Ask
How long have you been providing these services?	A specialist that is new to the business may not have the needed experience to assist you. This might increase your risks of a failed implementation. If in doubt, always get a second opinion from another specialist.
Who are your previous clients?	It is important to check references and the date of reference. The specialist must have good reputation. Frequent invitation to speak at local conference is a good indicator for this. Old reference dates may indicate that the specialist might not able to provide you with advice that is the most current and up to date.
What did your clients like best about your services?	This will give you a very good perspective on the approach and methodology of the specialist. It is very important that they have balanced understanding of business and technology. Successful technology implementation is less about technology and more about business. Beware of specialist who doesn't listen and then come out with a quote or proposal that doesn't resemble at all what you discussed. They should spend more time understanding your business, vision, process, and problem, instead of just selling and promoting their product features and technologies.
Do you resell products, such as hardware and software?	A specialist that only deals with one or two vendors may try to fit your business problem into their solution rather than finding the right solution for your business need. The ideal specialist should be independent and have no ties to any vendor, and able to shop for your choice of products and services.
How big is your programming team? What technologies or programming languages do they specialize in?	This will reveal that if the specialist is really a true specialist or a developer. The latter usually have a sizable programming team, which incurs high overhead costs where they will typically try to recoup from their fee. Ideally, a specialist should not have a fulltime programming team. This is to ensure maximum flexibility and cost effectiveness, as well as prevent giving opinions that are biased towards their team capabilities. A good specialist will assemble the team with the necessary expertise only after understanding your requirements.
Do you personally have any experience in programming?	To minimize implementation risk, the specialist himself must have solid experience in programming to the extent where he can roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty to support the team when necessary. Be cautious with specialists who come from business background and claim that technical skills are not required or relevant until the later stage. The ideal specialist should have strong technical background with good business sense.
What is your fee structure?	Be extra careful with specialists who do not do planning or do it at no fee. They will probably provide solution that will not work, or just a narrow view of choices, or have hidden fees to recoup those costs later, probably during implementation. Also, make sure that they don't ask for all the money up front, advance payment of 40 to 60 percent is considered fair.
How do you guarantee your services? What type of warranty do you provide?	Most specialists will promise client satisfaction, but how do they guarantee it. Timely delivery is one of the greatest challenges when it comes to technology implementation. So make sure your specialist provides some sort of service contract that ensures their on-time implementation.