OrbusSoftware

The Complete Guide

Application and Technology Roadmaps

Contents

3 Introduction

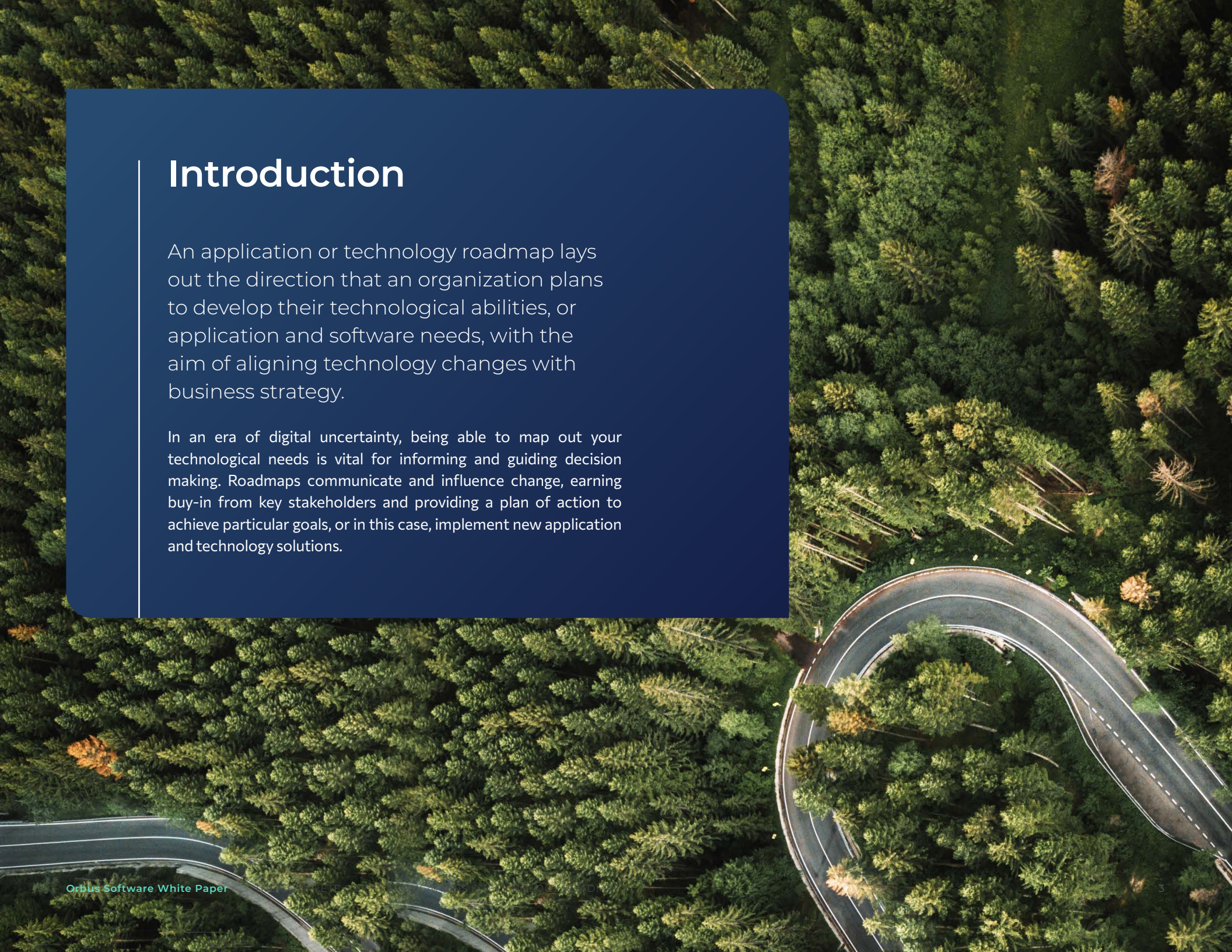
4 What is an application or technology roadmap?

5 What are the benefits of roadmapping?

6 The challenges for making a technology roadmap

7 How to create a technology roadmap

10 Conclusion



Introduction

An application or technology roadmap lays out the direction that an organization plans to develop their technological abilities, or application and software needs, with the aim of aligning technology changes with business strategy.

In an era of digital uncertainty, being able to map out your technological needs is vital for informing and guiding decision making. Roadmaps communicate and influence change, earning buy-in from key stakeholders and providing a plan of action to achieve particular goals, or in this case, implement new application and technology solutions.

What is an application or technology roadmap?

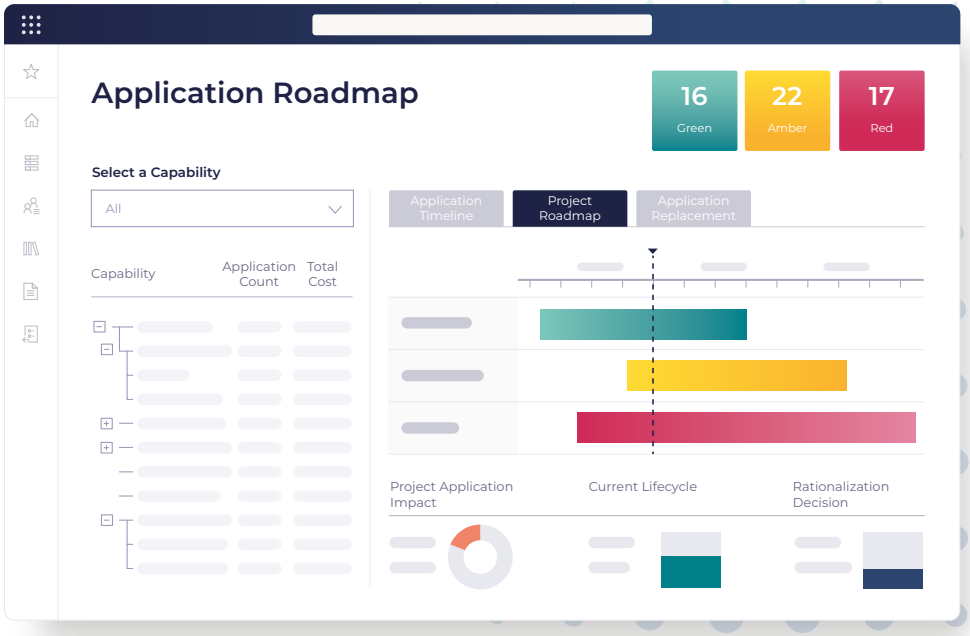
Application Rationalization (sometimes referred to as Application Portfolio Rationalization) is the act of reducing the size of an organization's application portfolio. In other words, using fewer Application and Technology Roadmaps are very similar, simply addressing different areas for an enterprise's IT function. As such, we'll refer to technology roadmaps from here, though largely the definitions can refer to both types.

A technology roadmap is essentially a plan for the future of a firm's technology initiatives. As the name implies, a roadmap is a visual document that is intended to demonstrate what business plans to do, how they will achieve them, and on what timescale. Roadmaps can be used in other business areas, with Gartner highlighting four main categories. As well as technology roadmaps, there are project roadmaps, capability roadmaps, and scenario roadmaps. Within these categories are further, more granular options, such as the aforementioned application roadmaps, which deal with the future of a firm's application portfolio.

Though roadmaps attempt to bridge the gap between the present and the future, there is an inherent unpredictability to technology. Longer timelines will introduce more variability into outcomes, as technologies advance and consumer needs change. In the short term, a technology roadmap could lay out a change as simply integrating a new tool in a production line, while a very long-term roadmap might speculate on the use of artificial intelligence and robotics.

What are the benefits of roadmapping?

Creating an application or technology roadmap can bring several benefits to an organization. First and foremost is the opportunity to align business technology with business strategy. Digital transformation is a difficult process, requiring buy in from all key stakeholders to be successful. However, the complexity of the process can serve to alienate or confuse those who aren't intimately involved with the subjects of the roadmap.



Another advantage comes from the reduction in risk from IT issues. Technological change has massive implications for organizations of every industry and of every size, and any actions which can help to manage that change will bring benefits. An overlooked advantage of a roadmap is that it can communicate how applications or technologies support a business, which may otherwise be opaque to stakeholders that don't come into contact with them day-to-day. More specifically, a roadmap can be a helpful tool for all aspects of the IT function. Whether you aim to manage costs, improve productivity or address cybersecurity issues, laying everything out in a roadmap can help. A roadmap can identify outdated technologies, or application rationalization opportunities, and uncover areas where the firm is at risk due to their current technology use.

The challenges for making a technology roadmap

There are a number of common issues that a firm can face when attempting to plan out a technology roadmap:

Having accurate data is crucial, as high quality roadmaps depend heavily on knowing data such as technology lifecycles and projected replacements.

The target state for a technology or application roadmap will often be unclear, which makes it impossible to move forward. Establishing the target state can take a significant investment of resources.

Complexity can be a big issue in modern enterprises, as there is simply a vast array of technology in use. This makes it highly labor intensive to map the current state of the enterprise, and as with any map, you won't get very far if you don't know where you are to begin with.

The longer the scale of the roadmap, the harder it becomes to accurately plan for technological change. This can become particularly problematic if radical innovations occur, as these events require a far more flexible approach than is typical.

How to create a technology roadmap

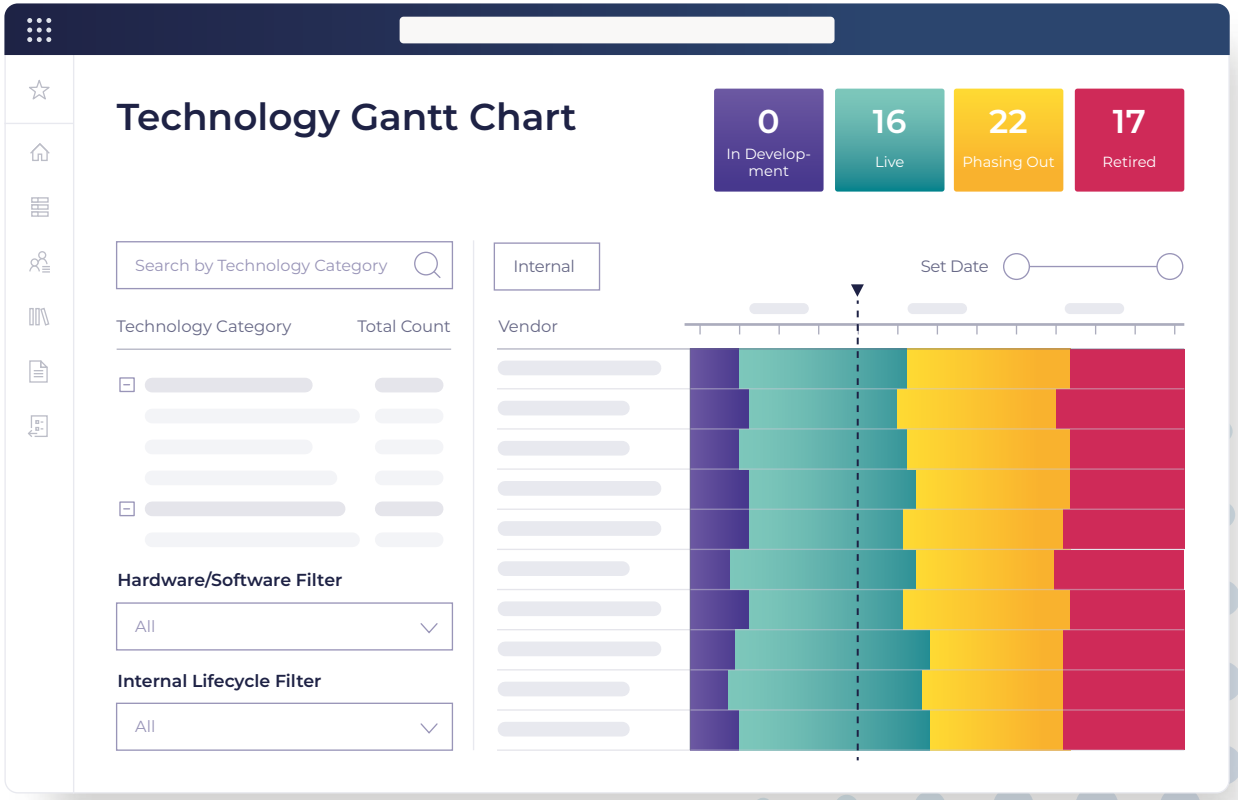
In order to create a formal, effective technology roadmap, an organization will likely require technology, whether through an application like Microsoft's Visio or a fully featured program such as OrbusInfinity. Nonetheless, there are aspects of the process that will be common to all implementations.

In general, a roadmap will go through three phrases.

1. **The first** is all about preparation.
2. **Next** is the creation of the roadmap, where the organization will create the physical document. In this stage, an organization needs to decide on factors such as the target state for their technology or application systems. This stage may also include the execution of parts of a roadmap, depending on its scale. This means assigning responsibility and determining goals, as well as working on gathering the necessary data.
3. **Finally**, businesses need to look back over the exercise and update or evaluate where necessary. Many roadmaps will require changes during their lives, while architects and others involved will want to review what improvements can be made in future. This is of course simplified and does not encompass many parts of a roadmap implementation.

Here we see a Technology Gantt Chart illustrated in OrbusInfinity, showing lifecycle data for a variety of technologies, indicating when they are in development, live for the enterprise, ready to be phased out, and fully retired. Alternatively, we can see an application chart that utilizes vendor lifecycle information to identify where a lifecycle gap could emerge.

This display is more typical of application roadmaps, illustrating every application which may become unsupported by its vendor, whether in terms of phasing out the application of completely retiring it.



Conclusion

Creating an application or technology roadmap is a great way to bring disparate stakeholders onto the same page for driving digital transformation.

However, the creation of a technology roadmap can be challenging and there are a wide range of factors for organizations to consider before starting. This initial guide has hopefully illuminated some of these factors. It should not be a surprise that application and technology roadmaps are such a popular use case for enterprise architects; stakeholders will always be happy to see the future laid out clearly. However, a note of caution is needed, as there could be a temptation to please stakeholders with inaccurate roadmaps. Even something as straightforward as an internal development roadmap can be subject to uncertainty, and roadmaps that are overly confident or unrealistic are arguably worse than nothing at all.

Hopefully, this eBook will help guide users to create roadmaps that are both reliable predictors of the future, and helpful tools for stakeholders. As this is a starting point for roadmaps, there are still a range of topics that we have not covered here.

For further detail on starting a technology roadmap, try **this blog post**.

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EBK0102/1125