Top Tips for Project Implementation

~ By Neil Davidson

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.
— Henry Ford

This quote from Henry Ford was used by a proud dad at a recent wedding I attended. It was a well chosen piece of advice, but as the managing director of a business solutions provider the quote hit a familiar note with me because it sums up exactly what we have been telling our clients during the implementation process.

In an increasingly fast paced world, clients want implementation to be quicker and less intrusive. It’s a tough thing to achieve because implementing a business solution is not a straightforward process, and there are certainly no quick fixes.

Completing a project quickly may please the client in the short-term but in the long term there’s a high chance that everyone loses out, there are many examples of projects which have ended in acrimony and disappointment.

There needs to be a good relationship between whoever is delivering the project and the client in order to make it a success, but as Ford says, both parties need to work at it. It’s understandable that companies want things done quickly, in theory it keeps costs down and doesn’t disrupt the core business. But rushing things inevitably leads to mistakes.

At Deltek, we provide project management and planning systems, so it’s vital for us that our implementation plan is effective and successful, it’s our bread and butter. But in order for this to work properly, the management team need to appreciate that in order to make an omelette, you need to break a few eggs.

So what steps can organisations take to ensure implementation projects run smoothly and end in success for all those concerned?

Sell in the Idea Internally

The management team in any business sets the tone and expectations for the rest of the employees. Therefore, it’s important to get the team behind the project and driving it forward right from the beginning. This will enable the whole business to understand the benefits of the new system, and how their current business processes will change for the better. Scheduling company or team meetings, regular email newsletters and bulletins are all ways of transferring this message.

Engaging employees early is therefore very important. Assessing the firm’s current processes is a good way of doing this, and it also enables you to understand how the new business solution can be tailored to work within the business. Find out how people plan, what methods and programmes they use, and how they control costs...
and deadlines. These types of questions give valuable insight into the way the business currently works and gives those people involved the opportunity to provide input.

The next step is to understand how the existing business processes can be improved. In order to ensure that a new system is utilised to its full potential it needs to be aligned to the goals of those using it.

**Seek and Ye Shall Find**

There are a multitude of different solutions out there and it's important that you find the right one for your business needs. The solution that you choose should be able to work as a stand-alone product, or integrated into any existing IT system. Business processes differ from company to company, so the solution needs to be flexible and above all, user friendly. After all, it is likely that people will be using it on a daily basis.

**Change Is as Good as a Rest**

Change management is possibly the most important factor in the implementation process. When a company is adopting a new ERP or finance system there are huge changes to their business processes, so there is a definite learning curve. Ideally, change management should be led by a consultant and it's important that at the start of implementation the consultant is ready with a change management blueprint tailored for the business.

Fundamental to the successful running of the blueprint is communication. Both consultant and client need to clarify how they will communicate the changes to the employees, be it department-specific or company wide meetings, intranet or newsletter releases, training days or WebEx. However you decide to do it you have to focus on two factors: always reiterate the business benefits of the implementation, and don't underestimate the support and ongoing training that your employees will require.

A very effective change management technique is to adopt a guinea pig department to pilot the new approach. Rather than a big-bang start, it is much more productive to begin with one department, this requires one department to test drive the system. This allows the consultant and the client to monitor the system at work on a small scale and react to any resulting issues. This steady progression generates confidence and understanding.

This gradual process of integration should be replicated with individuals as well. They should be encouraged to start off slowly and build up their knowledge and confidence of the new system. Being thrown in at the deep end can be daunting so it's important that everyone is comfortable, it may seem like hand holding, and those looking for a quick implementation may see this as unnecessary, but it's time well spent.

**Use It Successfully**

Once the implementation process is completed there needs to be a period of monitoring and assessment of the functionality, how is it working and who is using it well, who is experiencing teething problems? This needs to be done so that the investment is not wasted and the system is thoroughly effective.

We have found that approaching implementation in this way is a very successful strategy. It's about linking the soft skills, like team work, communication and knowledge transfer with the logical and practical skills that are also required to make any implementation work. No implementation is worry-free, but with a good provider, a great consultant and with this advice in mind, the process will be straight forward, predictable and manageable.
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