

The Human Side of Software Implementation

There have been many articles written about the huge failure rate of enterprise system implementations to deliver on time, on budget or to return the savings expected. The failure rate is currently 73%. Regardless of the type of system being deployed the results are similar. So, assuming that you purchased the correct software in the first place and have followed previous advice about ensuring the accuracy of the quotation in terms of services, how do we best ensure that your implementation ends up on the plus side of the ledger? We focus on the largest intangible of the project: the human side.

There are two things that humans need in order to carry their part of the project off successfully: Knowledge; and, Time.

Knowledge

There are several types of knowledge required in the implementation which I'll list in the order in which they should occur in the project.

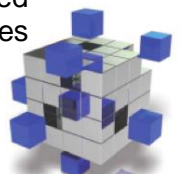
- ✚ Project management
- ✚ Knowledge of the business functions that the user must execute in the 'to be' or 'future state' environment
- ✚ Knowledge of the methodologies that the organization currently or in the future will utilize
- ✚ Knowledge of how the system works at a macro level
- ✚ Training on the various setup, maintenance, transactional, query and report functions that the user will execute to support the business functions and methodologies



Excellent project management capabilities are unique. While many people understand the concept of project management, few have the experience or mind-set of a good project manager. This person may not be in your organization. If not, you don't have time to develop one. Contract an outside project management consultant with experience in implementing the type of system that you're working with.



When an organization undertakes the implementation of a new system, it's also undertaking change in the way the organization will do business and/or collect and distribute information. Therefore, one of the first knowledge activities that should take place is a team kick-off meeting for the team leaders and significant users that will be deeply involved in the implementation. At this meeting the team is given a detailed review of what management expects the company to be doing once the system goes



live. Gap analysis of the current processes to expected processes is presented and feedback from the team is incorporated into the agreed upon target results.

In order to make those changes from the 'as is' to the 'future state' of the business, new methodologies and business processes will be introduced to, or improved within, the organization. All people affected by the methodologies require education. That is, they need to understand the concept of the methodology, how the process of the methodology works and what the result of the methodology should provide including Key Performance Indicators.

The new computer system will have some features and functions that all users should know about. Navigation, use of function keys, how to generate enquiries and reports, how to use the 'help' function, an overview of the basic technology of the system and a

view of 'how it all hangs together' is very useful knowledge to begin the user training process.



The next step is to train the team members on the features and functions of the actual computer application and then test their knowledge. The software firm will have people that come in and provide training on the modules and functions. During the training, the users should be conducting workshops to test the functions and ensure that the system is providing the results expected.

Time

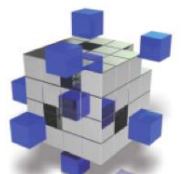
Once the training is complete, a full system test (often referred to as a 'pilot') needs to be conducted to ensure that the system is providing the results expected throughout all applications and that the users have begun to feel comfortable in executing their jobs with the new system.

Now that the test is complete, all users of the system need time to practice on the new system. For several weeks prior to going live with the system the users should set aside approximately 30 minutes daily to exercise the system with real data that they're using daily. Information should be shared across the teams so that the other users affected by the transaction entered can ensure that they are seeing the result expected.

All of these components of the human side are crucial to the successful implementation of a new system. To rush through, or have the wrong people working on, any one of these areas will ultimately cost the organization more than if you just spend the time and money to do it right the first time.

About the Author

Ken Cowman's career has spanned over 43 years with 11 of those in operations management followed by more than 30 years as an enterprise solutions and continuous improvement project manager, educator, seminar leader and management coach. He has had over 70 articles published in various magazines.



A founding executive of the APICS Peel Chapter, Ken was part of the OMERIC team that wrote the Fundamentals of Operations Management courses for APICS. He is also the past Chair of the Business Operations Management Program Advisory Committee at the School of Business at Centennial College.

Ken is also the author of Emercomm's Lean Enterprise Management methodology and leads the team that develops the LeanControl RTO[©] applications.

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