
Lessons Learned in Losing Weight & ERP Projects

Preface

It may not be obvious, but there are similarities in success and failure rates when it comes to losing weight and implementing ERP / business transformation projects.

The Weight

Coming into the 21st century I was quite overweight. At 5'9" (1.75m) I weighed in at over 225 pounds (102 kg) and had a size 42 waist. Other than the fact that I didn't like what had become of the body that had once ran the mile (1.6 km) in 4:23, was a hockey referee at the rep level, etc., there were some good health-related reasons to get my weight down. So, I read some articles and chatted with a few friends who had lost some weight and tried to get the weight down. I gave myself six months (June 30th timeline) to get down to 200 pounds.

Result: In six months I had lost only half of my target and had been stuck there for a while.

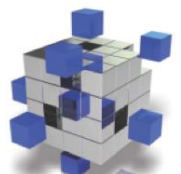
Action plan: Read some more about weight loss, look at a few weight-loss programs and talk to some more people about their weight loss journey.

Not to bore you with the ongoing saga of failure, but at the beginning of 2004 I was just under 200 pounds. In the interim, I had turned 50 and my doctor was warning me about certain family history issues, the pressure on my knee and back, etc. Given the amount of travelling I was doing (which included lots of airline and hotel meals), I just lived with the weight I had.



Fast forward to September 3, 2024: I weigh 155 pounds (70.3 kg). What changed?

1. Motivation: It was lose the weight or have a knee replacement and back surgery.
2. Advice: I had conversations with physicians and specialists in weight loss.
3. Learning: I learned to read the content and nutrition labels on food and beverage items. This led to changes in the quality of what I ate and drank and eliminated non-value-added intake. I also learned how to maintain my weight and improve my overall physical condition.
4. Process change: I had to change a number of my daily routines and processes so that I had time set aside for walking.



ERP & Business Transformation

Coming into the 21st century the failure rate of ERP and business transformation projects was known to be between 75% and 83% (depending on who's review you read). Other than the fact that these failures impact healthy organizations both financially and competitively, they tend to have many not-so-visible impacts on things like employee morale / turnover and reduces the level of credibility that management and organizations have with other stakeholders.

These projects are typically initiated by senior management due to the fact that they are getting beat up in the marketplace or by stakeholders. Or, the current systems being used are in danger of having the I.T. equivalent of a heart attack or stroke.

At the beginning of an ERP / Business Transformation initiative, organizations normally have targets for the timelines and results of the various projects. They assemble a team to determine what they should look for and the solution providers they should talk to. This is often done informally by looking up info on the internet and talking to people within various professional groups.

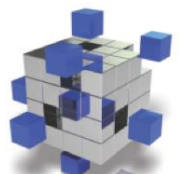
They also think that they have the right people internally to lead the project because the person was previously on an implementation team. In one situation, that person had been a financial team lead on a project nearly 20 years ago. *Has anything changed in the past two decades?*

Results: Missed dates, solution surprises and blown budgets.

1. Pick the wrong solution / supplier.
2. Pick the right solution but wrong supplier.
3. Pick the right solution and supplier but don't have realistic resource plans.
4. Lack of an organizational change management and process re-engineering plans.

Action Plan: Management either decides to live with what they have been able to get completed or there's a reset for Version 2 of the project. They may decide to change the professional services firm they are using for implementation in which case they have likely gone to user group meetings and talked to other users and the sales representatives of those other services organizations.

Result: Sometimes management's goals are finally realized. More often than not, there's a trade-off between going live to get some return-on-investment and taking more time and spending money to hit all the gains that were originally expected. These organizations will talk about having a plan for ongoing work to complete the project which typically are forgotten about within three months of going live.



Bodies & ERP / Business Transformation Similarities

We all have our own unique physiology. Doctors have the education and experience to understand your physiology and provide you with excellent suggestions for continued good health. You may have several doctors that you work with and each will have the opportunity to diagnose issues properly and, based on your unique physiology in that area, provide you with the service and / or prescriptions you need to stay healthy, get better, etc.

The other part of life is that our bodies and physiology will change over time. Therefore, the advice and services that come from your doctor(s) will be evolving.

If you were to take four men, 5'9" tall, weighing 155 pounds and born on the same day as I was and line them up beside me, would we all have the same physiology and ongoing requirements? If we chatted with our friends and asked for their recommendations / opinions, would they all be the same? Would those friends, with best of intention, be able to ask the right questions to give you advice that works?

If we all go to the same doctors, some of whom are specialists, would the prescriptions all be identical? Not likely, but we have a high probability of getting better and hitting our goals.

Business Transformation / ERP initiatives are unique to every organization that undertakes them. Yes, there are some parts that are common. However, each organization has its own unique culture, technology boundaries, client and supplier requirements, regulatory requirements and stakeholder expectations that will be fully or partially unique to organizations that may be in the same basic industry.

Your organization needs to have a consulting firm that knows more than the technology solution you've purchased (or are about to purchase). They not only assist you in hitting the original goals, but also help in defining your continuous improvement opportunities and plans for post-go-live activity.

Summary

These projects are often doomed from the start due to the client organization not engaging with organizations that have the expertise and experience required to properly educate and coach their client organization's management, project team and significant stakeholders.

About the Author

Ken Cowman's career has spanned 52 years with 11 of those in materials and operations management and more than 40 years as an continuous improvement and enterprise solutions project manager, educator, process re-engineering leader and management coach. He is the Managing Director and CEO of Emercomm (www.emercomm.com).

