

People are the key to implementing an ERP System successfully

Preparation

One of the most fascinating aspects of business software is the vastly different experiences and outcomes organisations have implementing the same application software, be this Agresso, COA Solutions, Oracle, SAP or SunSystems. Bearing in mind these are typically standard applications, albeit with lots of flexibility in terms of how they are structured and used, this should not be the case. Far more implementations should be implemented with less stress and better results.

Replacing business systems of course is inevitably challenging but with the right planning, commitment, understanding of the key objectives and having a team with the necessary skills there is no reason why an implementation should not be a business success and a very satisfying experience for all involved in the process.

People are the key differentiator in our experience, teamwork and preparation being paramount to success. Client and supplier need to work as one team understanding the need for change and then deliver to contract and expectations.

Successful projects demonstrate the following traits; clear scope, a well defined plan resourced effectively by a motivated team, working to realistic targets with clear direction and involvement from senior management.

In our recent experiences of Agresso implementations it has been proven that with good leadership, adequate resource and correctly matched skills projects have a higher chance of success.

For example, a top chef would not start making one of his most important meals for a large event without having the best ingredients and a strong team to support him.

Implementing ERP systems should follow the same basic principles when establishing a project team;

- *Build a team that possesses all the key skills*
- *Ensure that people have the time available to spend on the project*
- *Everyone understanding the objectives and business benefits to be derived from the new system*
- *Can do attitude*

The main factors to success are people, leadership, ownership and effective communication. The problem faced by many organisations is finding the correct skills quickly and effectively from within, spending time finding the right people makes a difference.

When choosing a team consideration should be given to the traits of team members, suitable people will be creative motivators, pragmatic, dynamic and possess lots of initiative, whilst unsuitable people will tend to be impatient perfectionists who are disorganised and far too busy to contribute to a team.

In reality organisations are bound by the limitations of a resource pool and it is likely that all the characteristics, good and bad are prevalent. Always be prepared for some negativity and have plans in place to overcome this in order to keep the team motivated. If anyone is un-cooperative or has a 'can't do' attitude this will have a corrosive influence on the rest of the team. So, try to avoid including such a person, however if their skills are needed try to use them only when required and not as a full-time team member.

The reasons organisations spend large amounts of money on securing new software varies but invariably much improved integrated processes are required as well as speedy access to pertinent business information. Hence the project team need to ensure that as they go through the implementation process the solution design will meet all these objectives. In order for this to be managed appropriately effective communication with the business is needed and proper expectations need to be set as to the changes that will occur, the training required and the associated timescales.

Arguably the most important factor in a successful project is the relationships that exist, firstly with the supplier of the ERP System and secondly between the project board, project managers and the project team members. Effective interaction between all these groups and a shared vision of achievement will nurture working relationships, increase motivation and contribute to success. It is very important that the correct relationship between the supplier project manager and your own project manager are formed as soon as possible. An appreciation of the different roles they both play is required and any cultural working differences need to be resolved in order that only one team is created not a 'them' and 'us' scenario. The supplier project manager must gain trust and credibility as swiftly as possible, if this is not apparent then project sponsors from both sides should meet as a matter of urgency.

Most project teams need expertise from the business or sometimes externally to help in managing change, understanding specific business knowledge for example supplier contracts, IT and technical architecture skills and end user training skills. Hence sufficient resources with clearly defined tasks need to be made available at the appropriate time in order for the project to be delivered successfully to time and budget.

We recommend the project team once initially trained on the application obtain thorough knowledge of the system through consultation with experts of the system and hence moving forward are not heavily reliant upon external resources. It is essential that comprehensive testing of a prototype system is undertaken prior to going live to ensure the new system functions correctly against the new procedures and working practices and that all inputs and outputs meet the organisation's requirements. Acceptance testing should be undertaken by end users following sufficient training to the end-user team to ensure compatibility of the system with their organisations business processes. The testing phase is vitally important and under no circumstances should it be reduced.

Finally it is essential the system is deployed in a timely fashion to the business. The plan for deployment needs to include;

- *Development of training strategy*
- *Communication and change strategy*
- *Confirmed ready for Go-Live check*
- *Build Production environment*
- *Data Load*
- *Training Programme in place*
- *Cutover plan in place*
- *Technical rollout to desktops*
- *Go Live*

Go-live is only the start and we will cover how to realise long term business benefits in a future article.

In summary avoid frustrations and take the initiative by being aware of the wider consequences, resolve issues and frustrations quickly and effectively, learn from any mistakes made and communicate well at all times. Remember not to ask too much of your team by setting unachievable deadlines or not defining responsibilities or objectives clearly enough and deal effectively with your supplier.

By following the correctly planned path you can enjoy the process and reap the benefits of success. It is important to keep morale high, be open, discuss issues and also have some fun by sometimes relaxing and socialising together.