Using Oracle Accelerators to Implement in Small and Medium Size Businesses

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Oracle Business Accelerators were originally launched in the United States under the name Special Edition which targeted small to medium companies looking to implement an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) application. Special Edition offered these business an opportunity to implement a subset of the Oracle E-Business Suite Applications in an expedient and cost effective manner while allow them to grow into the rest of the applications suite at a later time without having to change or re-implement the software. Currently Oracle Business Accelerators have expended beyond the original tool set to include several industries, country specific localizations and other features that appeal not only to Small and Medium Business but to a wider array of prospects.

The purpose of this presentation is to review an implementation that successfully utilizes the Oracle Accelerators for E-Business Suite as their implementation methodology and discuss the advantages and drawbacks of doing so. As mentioned, the Accelerator tool set has grown and improved significantly since this implementation was completed and continues to evolve. The tools however are only one part of the implementation, therefore it is important that we understand the entire methodology to ensure a successful implementation.

What does the term Business Accelerators mean?
First of all Oracle Business Accelerators is a special software license for the Oracle Applications that bundles a set of business flows together for a fixed price. Companies will buy the licenses that most completely fulfill their business requirements. Additional products may be added to the Accelerator license to increase the implementation footprint, but these modules or applications need to be implemented using the traditional implementation methodology. Customers may choose to defer the purchase of additional licenses buying only what they need to get started and adding additional functionality at a later date.   The accelerator tool is used by the implementation partner to configure and launch the applications. Its purpose ends when the customer reaches the go live point in the implementation. The additional collateral included with the tool lives on and will continue to be used by the customer throughout the lifecycle of their software.

Secondly, accelerators are a pre defined set of business flows that have been tested and proven to work as-is for several corporations using the E-Business Suite application. When a customer purchases the Accelerators they are accepting that with some variation, their business needs may be fulfilled by utilizing these standard practices. Change is the most difficult part of the process for the customer to accept. The implementation therefore starts with a baseline for performing transactions, processing data and reporting.   This foundation is used for the initial Conference Room Pilot (CRP) to validate the fit of the baseline applications, determine what gaps if any need to be filled and complete the implementation process. This foundation is defined in tools readily understandable by persons who are not familiar with the software's specific term or process as it is documented visually in the business flows and more specifically in the key assumptions

While it sounds simple, traditional implementation methods typically started with a blank slate.   The initial phase of the project would be to document and detail the as-is business processes. These would then be reviewed by the implementation team, evaluated, refined and re-written to come up with the future business baseline or the to-be process. Then the to-be process would be overlaid on the functionality of the applications to determine the initial gaps, the implementation team would configure the standard features of the application to meet the to-be process and eventually the system would be ready for the initial validation. By accepting the baseline configuration provided by the Accelerator, these weeks of design, documentation, setup and testing are shortened considerably and can even be done in as little as one week if the hardware and personnel resources are available.

While this may sound like a customer is buying one size fits all software that is really not the case. The personalization capability included in the accelerator tool set as well as the ability to turn off specific business flows that are not needed is tremendous. Each customer's implementation becomes a unique configuration based on pre-tested business flows. Customers may implement the same flows, but if one chooses to use the chart of accounts provide while another opts to configure their own account values, both will be able to achieve success with the accelerators and will be able to take advantage of the rapid implementation methodology.   Customers who do not buy in to the concept of using the process flows included within the accelerator, preferring to build what they need the way they want it may do so, but will have a lower likelihood of success.

Aside from the software licenses and the methodology, several other valuable items are included with the Business Accelerators. These include training videos developed using the User Productivity Kit, Test scripts which follow the same process as the training vides but also include details on the pre-requite and post requisite steps, sample templates for business forms such as invoices and purchase orders that may be modified with basic business tools like Microsoft Word to include logos and client specific details and most importantly a set of dashboards including some very powerful key-performance indicators (KPIs). Most implementation projects will not even address KPIs until after there is a year's worth of data in the system and will include only some basic transaction based dashboards. These are the elements that customers will use over and over again as they acquire additional personnel, upgrade the software or expand their businesses through acquisitions and need to incorporate other entities into the application footprint.   While these tools will never prevent customers from having to write their own procedural documentation detailing the exact manner in which they intend to utilize, control, maintain and audit the use of the software they provide a starting point for the customer to work from.

The Accelerator team within Oracle continues to test its product. If you do happen to encounter an issue, the fact that your configuration was based on a standard approach should decrease the duration for resolution. Oracle will be able to test and to attempt to replicate the error on a copy of the application very similar to yours on their own software.

The configurable tools of the application included with the Accelerator do not cause a version lock. Once you are live, the software functions as any other E-Business Suite implementation would so that you are able to upgrade, add to and decommission applications or functions as your business needs change. Currencies, languages and

other special features can also be added at any time as your organization continues to grow.

Does it work?
Core Services was able to aide an organization in achieving a go live date seven weeks after the project kickoff using the Oracle Business Accelerators for E-Business Suite. This customer implemented a subset of the General Business Accelerator on Oracle Applications version 11.5.10. The customer also decided to host their applications, so there was no lead required to procure hardware. The sever was being built the day that the functional teams met to introduce the project and the timeline and was ready by the time the personalization questionnaire was completed. The technical an functional teams were able to work in parallel through most of the project.

This company employs over five hundred people and Owns/operates assisted living communities in several states. While some of their business practices were centralized, others were distributed to the facility level. The application users, previewed the training videos, had their specific questions ready and then attended a customized instructor led training course to make sure everyone had the same understanding of the business practice.

They were able to get their primary operations live on the financial business flows including setup, validation, opening balance conversion and training on time and in budget. They encountered only two gaps in the business flows that needed to be fulfilled. One required a custom program to sign checks up to a certain dollar amount when they were printed. The order involved additional setup of the accounting functions to balance entries between various entities (accelerator is designed with a single entity approach) to allow for an automated and streamlined consolidation at month end.

Keys to success;
1. Before you start make sure that the customer and the implementation partner both accept that the business flows selected and the key assumptions will meet the customer's baseline requirements.
2. Utilize the training vides and the consultants experience to understand the way the software works as delivered before you start the validation process. If the same information is delivered in a manner different than you were used to, it might be acceptable if you understand how the system works. Many customers use the initial validation as a means to say why the software won't meet their needs and being reconfiguring or customizing it before they have an understanding of the end to end business process delivered by the Business Accelerators.
3. Do not rely solely on the training videos for super users or business analysts. While they are ideal for the end users, follow up the videos with specific training sessions and most importantly trouble shooting sessions. The videos will tell you how to run the processes to transfer the data from the sub ledger to the ledger, but you will need to refer back to the user guides, online support and consultant's experience to resolve the exceptions.
4. Use real life scenarios when testing and make sure you test normal transactions as well as the ones that occur only occasionally. This tip does not apply only to accelerator projects, but to all implementations. Just because you are able to create a customer named Daffy Duck during the test cycle does not mean you will realize that you cannot create a customer

named University of Way Out West – Office of the Dean of Visions and Forward Thinking (or a similar value that is too long to fit on the form or perhaps on the printed document.

5. Keep the momentum going. If you hit a gap, determine if there is a way to work around it to complete the rest of the business process using the accelerator baseline. Once you are able to see what is on the other side it will help you as the customer and the consulting firm determine the best way to bridge the gap.

What Accelerators will not do:

1. Configure the applications for subsequent roll outs and acquisitions. The tool is to be used to define the processes for the initial entity only. Subsequent companies or lines of business may be added using the traditional implementation means.
2. Convert data. Low volumes of information may be uploaded through the configuration tool, but there is no automated means included within the Business Accelerators to bring over several years of transactional data.
3. Provide tools for customizing the applications. Personalizing the configuration and some of the report outputs is possible through these tools, but changing the internal workflows, re designing the forms, providing additional pop up alters or notifications must be done with the standard tools.