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A Case For The Human Side:
Clearing the hurdles in technology implementations

Let's face it, Information Technology (IT) reaches into every part of a company. Twenty or thirty years ago, IT, on average, may have touched 5-10 percent of an organization. Today, it is safe to say it's as high as 85-90 percent. With this, a new set of rules and practices is challenging the way business has traditionally been conducted.

IT projects used to sit in the hands of the IT department, and were their sole responsibility. IT gathered information and needs from business users. A solution was assembled through custom development, off-the-shelf software or a combination, and then the solution was turned over to the business users. Project teams operated within a relatively similar background. With this model, business users were rarely involved beyond the initial request. The result of this process? Often, projects struggled to show a return on value and/or they went over budget.

Today, IT solutions are increasingly being driven by Business Managers rather than IT Managers. Today it is rare to see a large project that is completely run by IT. This trend counters more than 30 years of collected wisdom on the fundamentals of implementations and solution management. To gain a competitive edge, project teams and organizations can no longer ignore such areas as professional development, cultural architecture, communications, team building/strengthening, and project enhancement.

People are the key to success
To be successful, technology implementations hinge on the involvement of collaborative work teams. A typical project team may consist of members from IT, Sales, Marketing, Manufacturing, Distribution or any number of other internal departments. In addition, projects today also include one or more consulting organizations, each with his own ideas as to how the project should proceed and which results are the most important. In this kind of environment, project teams can easily become dysfunctional, wasting time arguing about minor issues and allowing personal agendas to get in the way of the final goal. These work teams, if they are savvy, can learn to anticipate how people will impact an implementation process – the one true wild card in technology projects. If you don't plan for the human elements within an implementation, you'll be hard pressed to meet your goals, deadlines or budget.

A popular trend in organizational development has been the incorporation of team-building efforts into major business initiatives. While this alone will help in the initial phases of any project, without reinforcement and focused efforts, the effect rapidly diminishes over time. In addition, if basic communication and cultural "norming" are not

addressed immediately, and "scope creep" not managed, a project can easily grind to a halt. Usually these types of changes happen gradually on a project and thus remain imperceptible until it is too late.

CSS International, Inc., an Oracle Titan Award Partner, has long since realized that the key to keeping a project on track is to incorporate specific tools and methodologies designed to ensure team and project focus.

Helping a client build a new team culture

For example, CSS was brought into a manufacturing organization that was conducting a full Oracle implementation. This company had exploded in size over two years to over $300 million in annual sales. They realized the transition to an ERP system was needed to remain competitive. The company's corporate culture thrived on a long decision-making process and safe choices. These business practices resulted in competitive disadvantages in technology as well as future developments in supply-chain management, customer relationship management and product-data management. This company's decision making process presented an initial road-block. They needed to "go-live" with Oracle in 11 months vs. the "scoped" 16 months for this project. The project faced a clash with the existing culture of the organization. To use an analogy: the project needed to be driven at 125 mph, yet the company moved around 35 mph.

In a situation like this, if an organization forces the project and its enabling technology, without addressing cultural implications, failure is the result. There is a rule of thumb that I recommend organizations live by: "*Rules without relationships lead to active or passive rebellion.*" These rules can be changes in culture, reassignment of roles, new business processes, changes in software functionality, etc.

In the case of this implementation, CSS made a conscious decision to create a separate team and culture (within the new project team) for the implementation period. This new team was able to function in parallel with the company's existing culture, employees and processes. When the implementation ended, so did the new project team's culture. The culture of the new team that was created resulted from an assessment of the company's capabilities, knowledge of their organization, and collaboration with internal stakeholders. By helping the organization understand what was needed to make sure the project moved swiftly and in scope, they were able to gather the right people/resources at the right time and reduce resistance to the changes new technology brings.

The work that CSS did with this company illustrates that addressing the human factors up-front can turn a relatively small investment of time and staff resources into impressive results. In this case we were able to shave weeks off of the project simply by conducting a highly specified "*Project Launch.*" Using a set of tools that are a standard part of CSS's methodology, we were able to compress the "*norming*" process that takes 4-6 weeks, down to 8-10 hours! People understood their roles and were not put off by the new technology and the changed workflow. Cooperative work-teams were built amongst consultants, IT, and business staff.

Throughout any project it is imperative that employees and executives are consciously involved in the process of the implementation. I suggest executive-level workshops to provide an understanding of how the new technology supports a company's short- and long-term strategies. With any implementation, a certain degree of organizational change needs to take place. Often, a steering committee is the most effective way of gaining support and buy-in. In addition, such areas as human resources and business objectives, training and offline case reviews should be considered. It doesn't cost a lot of money or time to consider the people factor in an implementation process and the payoffs can be enormous: reduced turnover, increased productivity, improved morale, optimized technology, and a culture that is able to manage change positively.

What hurdles should you watch out for?

Because no one person can implement a large-scale project alone, the involvement of every stakeholder is an absolute necessity. So, how does a project succeed, avoiding the pitfalls inherent in a complex change? Hurdles associated with projects can be avoided through a number of approaches:

- Initial Project Evaluation that examines the proposed project to establish clear business goals, measurable objectives, prioritization of objectives, feasibility of time frame and budget, etc.
- Evaluate consulting firms:
    - Do they have the Technical/Business fit or business experience to do the job?
    - Are they a good cultural fit? Do they have a complementary value system, work ethic, etc.?
    - Is their project approach consistent with your stated goals and objectives.
    - Are they psychologically a good fit with the project team,
- Evaluate the project organization:
    - Can you break down the project into logical units, and will implementation of the units be phased or simultaneous.
    - How will the project team be organized? Will there be an overall project manager with team leads and members, or one manager with no team leads and members, or part or full time members, subject matter experts, etc.
- Project Team Selection and Organizational Development/Strengthening
- Project Team Training
- Change Training for End Users
- Team Building
- Project Audits
- Post Implementation Off-Line Reviews

Today IT professionals are faced with issues that go far beyond technology, issues. They involve business operations, such as communications, cultural architecture, workflow processes and professional development. If these issues aren't addressed initially, trouble will not be far away. Rarely does an implementation go over budget/over time on hardware or software issues alone…it's the people issues that can cause missed milestones and thwarted efforts. Take care of the people and the technology will follow.