

How to maximize your technology investments to support your business - Part 2

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Last week I talked about the pitfalls associated with selecting your tool. This week I will follow up with the other two key areas: Implementation and Roll out and On-going Maintenance.

Implementation and Roll Out

The implementation and roll out stage is a key stage to ensuring successful deployment. Here are a few steps to include in your roll out strategy to avoid costly pitfalls later on:

1. Align your processes and technology

One of the most common pitfalls with technology solution dissatisfaction is the absence of process alignment with the technology solution. All technology solutions need to have guidelines or instructions on how to use it to add value.

Here are some key things that should be considered when communicating and documenting your guidelines:

- **Be specific about what the tool is supposed to do.** End users should be clear on what the tool does and does not do. This will reduce the number of “issues” that are reported to the helpdesk.
- **Be specific about what the business rules are for using the tool.** Business rules dictate the manner and protocol in which the tool should be used. An example of a business rule is the length of time to post a job versus the functional process of how to post a job.
- **Make materials widely available.** There should be a centralized place where end users can find materials to help them build their knowledge. If you make it cumbersome to find information, it will become a chore, not an opportunity.
- **Create opportunities to reinforce knowledge about the tool.** Training sends the message to end users that the tool is an investment that they need to embrace and take ownership for.
- **Measure results to manage change.** If people are not following the process or it's “not working” you need to know as soon as possible, evaluate why and assess next steps. Often poor system adoption is attributed to *resistance to change*.

Lesson: To add value, your tool needs to have both business rules and process guidelines that support it.

2. Once you roll out, use the six months to stabilize your product

Implementations for enterprise wide tools can take anywhere from 1 to 2 years from beginning to end to roll out and require a substantial cost commitment by the

organization. Once the tool is rolled out, a stabilization (no new major changes) period is required to:

- Encourage user adoption
- Manage the learning curve
- Recover costs
- Demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency savings

After the first six months, look at ways to expand your tool to meet changing business needs. This helps establish the credibility of the tool.

Lesson: The first six months should be used to build credibility for your tool and change management for end users, recipients and other key stakeholders.

3. Measure and share results

Any business understands that measures are critical to demonstrating success and/or failures. For example, when a new movie is released, success is measured by box office sales. Your technology solution is no different. Once your tool is rolled out you need to demonstrate how your tool is effective and efficient. This typically takes at least a year before you can start to demonstrate successes and/or failures, but it is a very critical component in the overall processes. Regular measures about the tools successes and gaps are important to communicate successes and gaps early on.

Lesson: Assess process and technology performance regularly and consistently.

On-going Maintenance

Once you implement you will need to have a support mechanism in place to ensure feedback and recommendations are handled appropriately. This is part of the business value chain and should be used to continuously add value and improve effectiveness and efficiencies.

1. Establish governance processes for on-going maintenance and changes

There will be opportunities to maximize your tool either by the vendor or by your organization. It is important to establish proper governance processes to manage these changes. Your governance framework should include:

- ***Requiring a business case for changes.*** System changes are not free. Make sure proposed changes will add value to all the end users and other stakeholders that will use the tool.
- ***Evaluating changes against the overall strategy.*** Changes should support your overall business strategy.

- **Identifying who has overall accountability to approve change requests.** An approval process is key to ensuring changes align to strategy and add value.
- **Identifying one person who will manage the relationship with the vendor.** Requests funnelled through one person it will help meet your expectations.

Lesson: Governance provides the structure necessary to manage expectations and assess requests against the overall strategy.

2. Rely on your vendor, the true subject matter expert

When using a technology solution, it is important to remember that subject matter expertise *about the tool* resides first and foremost by the vendor. I have seen end users designing functionality for a technology solution instead of outlining the business requirements and asking the vendor to provide a solution. What's the difference? You would not go to the doctor and tell him/her what medication to prescribe. A doctor assesses your symptoms and recommends a solution for your symptoms.

The *vendor is the ultimate subject matter expert on their tool*. They are there to provide advice, guidance and solutions to help you meet your business needs. *End users are the ultimate subject matter experts on the business requirements*. I have seen end users design custom functionality that ends up not being used, not meeting the true business needs, and/or prohibiting upgrades down the road. To avoid this pitfall, work with your vendor and establish a process where business requirements are identified and let them provide you with recommendations for solutions. The process should be interactive between both parties, but do not try to box vendors into delivering specific functionality or building something they do not recommend.

Lesson: The vendor is the ultimate subject matter expert on their tool. The client is the ultimate subject matter expert on the business requirements. Let your vendor develop a solution that meets your business requirements.

3. Continuously measure your ROI

There have many arguments about whether you can truly measure ROI on non-revenue generating tools. I consider ROI as a measure that demonstrates accountability for decisions. Shareholder reports demonstrate corporate accountability to the public using measures like ROI and ROE (Return on Equity). By measuring ROI, administrative functions can equally demonstrate they take a shared accountability in overall operations of the organization. It builds credibility and shows how value is added to your organization.

Lesson: ROI will help you build credibility within the organization.

I hope these tips will help your organization become successful with technology deployments in the future.

BIO

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