Top 10 Software Implementation Errors

Most of us have heard the horror stories of software implementations gone wrong. No company is immune regardless of size or money invested. As business owners, you have two choices; learn from your own mistakes or learn from others’. Let’s pursue the latter and discuss some common errors to help you avoid becoming a statistic.

1) Old inefficiencies are retained

If your current process was that excellent, you probably wouldn’t invest in a software implementation. Yet it is the mentality of some to try to make the new system support the old business process. While this may not be a blatant mistake, it can be one that challenges the need for the implementation in the eyes of your employees. Typically, the primary reason for a software implementation is to increase efficiency and improve the business process, but so many meetings and conversations are held between the identification of the need and the actual implementation that the original reason for the project is often lost. Take advantage of the software implementation as an opportunity to start new and eliminate inefficiencies.

2) Employee Input is too narrow

All too often, an implementation occurs simply because a single department is trying to address a single need. Only the employees who appear to be “directly involved” are brought into the evaluation process. While this may seem harmless, it can undermine the implementation from the start. Since a company is made up of interacting departments and not silos of activity, it is important to get the input of all departments that interface with those who will be using the new system. This will cause the implementers to consider their interaction with other departments, resulting in greater satisfaction and buy-in by neighboring groups and improving the long-term viability of the system.

3) Scope is too large

Software can look as if it will “solve all of our problems”, and often it can greatly contribute. But companies often take on more than they can handle and end up with an implementation that is simply larger than they can legitimately accomplish. When choosing to move forward with a system, do everything possible to minimize the scope of the initial implementation. Instead, look to start off with the base system or the part of the system that directly affects the fewest number employees. Once the initial implementation is successful, adding additional functionality is typically much easier, cheaper, less time consuming and more welcome by the users.

4) Management does not cast vision

We’ve all been told that something was happening without being told why it was happening. This is frustrating for most people, especially methodical, process-oriented employees who know their job and have done it for an extended period of time. Simply telling employees that a change is occurring is not good enough. Management must explain why this implementation is happening and the benefits to the company, their department, and the employee individually. Informing employees of how an implementation will increase the company’s profitability and, in turn, increase their personal job security will greatly enhance adoption.

5) Processes are not prepared

Software systems do not fix bad business processes; they can only improve successful ones. Embarking on an implementation without a clear plan as to what the new process will be for each employee will almost, without question, fail. Employees must know exactly how the new system will fit into their current daily work flow. If the current process is to change, they need a process map to help them make the transition. Most employees are willing to change for the good of the company, they simply need good direction.

6) Integration with legacy systems dominates focus

The importance of integration between a new system and your legacy systems is understood. But one must not allow this integration to dominate the focus of the software implementation as this can shift the focus away from the primary reason the software implementation is occurring in the first place. Of course the value of sharing data between systems is highly important and is typically a principal reason for a software implementation, but focusing all efforts on the integration and not on the value the new system brings to the table can cause the project to fail before it gets started. While some rekeying of data may be an inconvenience, the effort to do so is probably no greater than the current
business process. Therefore, you should weigh the value the new system’s functionality brings on its own merit and look to integration as a way to increase the overall value by minimizing double entry when possible.

7) **Consultants are not engaged**

While consultants may seem expensive, they are no where near as expensive as a failed software implementation. It is highly recommended that you use a consultant to facilitate your software implementation process. Consultants add leadership that may be difficult to achieve with an internal employee. The financial commitment by management to have the participation of a consultant puts value on the process and provides incentive for employees to act on the end results, helping to ensure that it doesn’t turn out to be “just another project” that doesn’t go anywhere.

Consultants also bring focus to the process as employees tend to not waste time when they are working with someone who is ‘on the clock’. Experienced process consultants can often achieve results faster than people within the organization, resulting in a shorter engagement time frame and lower overall costs for the project. Consultants also bring objectivity and experience from many other businesses that can provide solutions to your business problems.

Note that a consultant may act as the project leader but does not have to be present at every meeting. Costs can be contained by involving the consultant periodically to review the progress and help the team through difficult decisions.

8) **Management is not involved**

While management may approve the project and “write the check”, they are all too often absent from the actual implementation process. A member of the Executive Management team must participate in the implementation and be ultimately responsible for its success. Implementations that do not get this level of participation run the risk of appearing unimportant and unsupported. It also leaves the door wide open for failure with minimal consequence as the software becomes the scapegoat for the failed implementation.

9) **Implementation Timelines are not enforced**

Many implementations have been known to fail because they simply take too long. The momentum is high at first, but employees get busy with their daily workload and the implementation gets delayed “until next week”. Unfortunately, odds are high that this busyness will happen again next week, so the cycle begins. If this is allowed to occur, it becomes acceptable behavior and the implementation fails due to neglect. To prevent this, establish a firm timeline and incent employees to give proper time to the implementation. No employee will ever get their job done to the extent that they “have time” to work on an implementation. You must make time, and that will only happen if the executive management team gives them the freedom to do so.

10) **Usage is not enforced**

If you are successful at getting through the implementation and training of your new system, you must be cautious of the emotion employees have developed toward their own manual processes and “home grown” systems. They will hesitate to let go of them because they are familiar with them and they seem faster because of familiarity and the fact that their current processes don’t have to consider integration like your new system.

In the heat of battle, they are often allowed to revert back to their old ways with the excuse of taking care of the customer faster. While this may seem justifiable, short cutting the new system greatly jeopardizes its acceptance and longevity. Management must support and enforce the use of the new system at all costs. Without enforcement, it will only be a matter of time before the system is abandoned and fails.

While the list of errors is long, a successful implementation is achievable with up-front planning, good leadership, and a focused effort. Remember, there is never a good time to go through an implementation, so move forward at your earliest opportunity knowing that the end result will be a more efficient and more profitable company.