

Webshorts – Benefits – What Benefits ?

Here's something to make you think before you invest lots of money and time implementing a new solution – when was the last time you actually heard of a new implementation delivering the perceived business savings within the first month of it's operation ?

Now don't get me wrong, I'm a big fan of new developments when they are justified, however I like to think of myself as a realist, and therefore understand that it's only the very best planned and implemented projects that hit the ground running and don't degrade the current performance.

During my time I've been involved in many hardware / system / solution selection phases, with countless different suppliers. Throughout all of the related meetings, I can't recall seeing or hearing any suggestion from potential suppliers that the implementation may actually result in difficult operating conditions while the solution settles in and the users find the best way to make it work for them. This scenario really is a case of Emperors New Clothes, as the majority of experienced implementers will, unofficially and at the right time, share horror stories of past implementation nightmares.

The answer is simple. Plan, test, plan again, and then set realistic expectations.

Initially plan every aspect of the project and implementation. Don't forget that many projects are a one off exercise, therefore planning may require expertise from an experienced implementer. Don't rely on the supplier to tell you what could go wrong or how unrealistic their 'standard' project plan is – if it's not in their interest to tell you that projects don't always deliver on day one, then it's definitely not in their interest to tell you that their default project plan is best case and has not been tailored for your organisation. Remember that every implementation is different.

Testing the solution will not only prove that the elements of the solution will stand up in their own right, but is also the only opportunity most projects have to demonstrate that all elements of the project are ready for the Live operations. Taking a step back at this stage is invaluable but not always achievable. If the dress rehearsal element of testing did not give a 95% or better success rate, at full production volumes, then don't expect the Live operation to deliver anything better (in fact expect much worse). Remember that the testing is controlled, and Live operations aren't. Again, at this stage an experienced independent view on whether the operation is ready will prove invaluable and will help to set realistic expectations.

Plan again. Many project plans stop at the 'Live' milestone as this is the point that the implementation is handed over. The Live operations that produce best results early on are the ones where the planning continues through for the first three to six months of the Live operations. All resources and processes must not be overlooked for the entire duration of this period. An error that is made time and again is to allow all of the project team (usually the most experienced users at this stage), to either leave the project or go on holiday a month after Live operations commence. It's this short term planning and perceived cost saving

that often results in a much higher expense in the long run. The Live planning should include contingency planning for as many 'what if' scenarios that can be dreamed up. Carrying out this exercise away from the pressure of a Live melting pot will produce much clearer direction.

Finally, set realistic expectations throughout your organisation and any other companies that you will be dealing with during the start up phase. There will inevitably be hiccups, but if you communicate the likelihood beforehand, demonstrate a willingness to communicate, and ensure that you have allies in all the right places then the will to succeed will be spread throughout your business.

Keith Rogers
Senior Consultant