Seven Steps You Can Take to Help Make Your Implementation a Success

LONGBOW ADVANTAGE

It is no secret. The failure rate for enterprise software implementations is high. Surveys consistently show that as many as 65 percent of enterprise software implementations fail to achieve all or most of the organization's major goals. But that doesn't mean your company's implementation has to suffer the same fate. There are steps you can take to help make sure your implementation is a success. This white paper will look at seven key ones.

1. Develop an accurate, realistic, and effective project plan

Your project plan is the blueprint for the implementation. It is a critical document, one that sets out how your implementation will be managed, executed, and controlled.

It should be detailed enough to clearly define the resources, milestones, and timelines required for a successful outcome. Any errors, omissions, or miscalculations in the project plan will propagate through the implementation process, causing potentially serious and costly problems as the project moves through its stages.

Make sure your project plan is accurate, realistic, and effective.

2. Allocate sufficient resources

Because an implementation can be a costly undertaking, companies will sometimes cut corners when it comes to allocating resources. They may budget too few hours for critical tasks or fail to commit sufficient manpower. Some companies will opt to proceed without the help of an implementation partner. The end result is invariably system performance and functionality problems. The cost to remedy these problems can well exceed the dollars originally saved.

As many companies have learned the hard way, there are no shortcuts to a successful software implementation. The best course of action is to allocate sufficient resources at the outset, rather than being forced to play a costly game of catch-up later on.

3. Set a realistic go-live date

It may be tempting to set a go-live date that is tied to internal company needs or time frames, rather than one that is based on the requirements of the implementation process. But that is ill-advised. Setting an unrealistically tight time frame can jeopardize the success of the project. Critical steps may be missed, or only partially completed. And not enough time may be set aside for testing, training, and change management, all of which are essential to implementation success.

Set a go-live date that allows enough time to properly execute all the implementation steps and processes. Otherwise, you are putting your implementation at risk.

4. Use the services of an experienced implementation partner

Enterprise software systems are highly complex, and require a significant amount of expertise to configure, customize, and integrate properly. Companies that lack this kind of expertise in-house can benefit greatly from the services of an experienced implementation partner. A skilled implementer will know how to best approach your project, how to troubleshoot problems quickly and efficiently, and how to avoid project delays and cost overruns.

Look for a partner that has a proven track record of success in the type of system you are implementing. The knowledge, skills, and expertise your implementation partner brings to the project can easily make the difference between success and failure.

5. Pay close attention to testing, training, and change management

These three implementation aspects share two key characteristics: they are essential to implementation success and companies regularly pay too little time and attention to them.

Testing should be conducted rigorously at all three levels: unit, system, and user acceptance. A common mistake is to not test sufficiently at the system level; that is often the weakest link in the testing chain. However, every phase of testing is critical. At the end of the day, proper testing means more than finding and fixing bugs in the software. It means being certain that the system works as intended at every level of performance and functionality—before you go live.

Thorough training will arm your employees with the knowledge and experience to work efficiently with the new software. Your goal should be to ensure that your people are skilled,
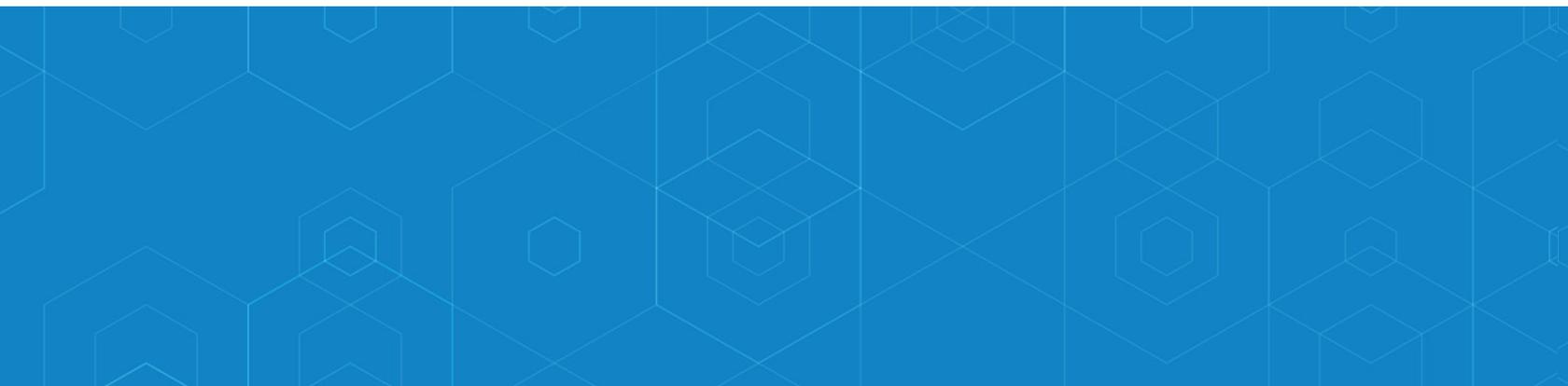
confident, and productive when you go live. Otherwise, you may end up bearing the high cost of performance problems and operational slowdowns that can result from a lack of attention to training.

New software invariably means new ways of conducting certain business processes. Effective change management will help your people make the transition smoothly and effectively. It is worth bearing in mind that user resistance to a new system is one the major factors contributing to project failure.

6. Get buy-in for the project from top management

If your project is not supported by the highest levels of management, it may not get the resources required for a successful outcome. Corners may be cut, deadlines may be squeezed, and decisions may be made that reduce the likelihood of project success.

Active support and participation from top management will also help ensure clear project objectives are set and effective project governance is established. Many implementation experts agree that lack of buy-in from top management can, in many cases, prove to be the most fatal mistake.

7. Roll out the implementation in stages

If your project involves multiple sites, it is advised to fully implement the system at one site first, and then roll out the others in sequence. Taking a "big bang" approach that involves going live at multiple sites simultaneously carries a very high level of risk. You may discover that your entire operation is crippled because of unexpected problems. A false start up at one site is serious; at multiple sites, it could be disastrous.

The same logic applies if you are moving from a paper-based system to an enterprise solution for the first time. The amount of effort required in terms of process changes, training, and user acceptance can be extremely high. Implementing the system in stages will make the transition more manageable and avoid straining company resources beyond their limits.

While the steps covered in this business brief may seem obvious, indeed a matter of common sense, many companies fail to follow them. But they do so at the risk of compromising the success of their project. An enterprise software implementation demands the right execution. By making the proper decisions, and following the correct steps, your company can enjoy a successful implementation—and all the business benefits that brings.

About Longbow Advantage:

Longbow Advantage is a leading supply chain consulting services firm with deep expertise in warehouse and labor management systems. We put a premium on customer experience, and we value the trust customers put in us to deliver the highest quality in the industry. Our customers are industry leaders who turn to us for our industry experience, faster implementation, and lower total project cost.

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