ERP Projects in the Post COVID world - Part 1

For the past 12 months Absolute ERP have been working with a customer implementing IFS Applications 10 across a variety of global sites, and due to this geographical spread, most of the workshops and interactions for the project needed to be carried out using on-line collaboration tools. Many of the project consulting team found this to be a challenge and many regularly expressed the desire to 'get on-site as soon as possible'. This mode of working did allow the project to continue for quite a long time into the COVID lockdown, relatively smoothly.

Many of us are now realising that as social distancing rules are likely to be part of the 'new normal', along with 'Test and Trace' procedures and even infection tracking apps. Since these will restrict consultants working alongside users, and limit face-to-face meetings and workshops, the value to an ERP consultant of 'On-site days' will be significantly reduced. Technical consultants have been accustomed to working remotely most of the time, but this has never been the preferred mechanism for most Project Managers and Functional Consultants. Whilst many will applaud the reduction in time spent ploughing up and down the nation's motorways, and attempting to be productive in airport departure lounges, this will require us to stop moaning about remote working and properly embrace it.

There is no doubt that carrying out an ERP implementation remotely presents many challenges. Some of these are new, and others are simply amplification of the usual ERP project risks.

New issues include:
- Getting a clear understanding of current business operations (especially Manufacturing and Warehouse processes) without 'walking the floor'.
- Demonstrating proposed new ways of working
- Building rapport and trust with managers, key users and end-users.

Amplified Issues could include:
- Lack of time commitment from key business personnel
- Management Buy-in and Commitment
- Inadequate user training

I believe, however, that there are also some major potential benefits to a project being carried out remotely. these include:
- Enforced improvement in documentation of discussions and decisions.
- Accelerated roll-out timescales, through sharing of experienced resources across sites, allowing big-bang go-lives to be supported more easily by a central project team.
- Greater parallel development of processes at multiple sites by holding global workshops.
- Easier involvement of ERP vendor resources in project activities

So, if we can do things better this way even when (or if) global circumstances allow the lifting of social distancing rules, why would we not want to?

To gain the benefits I listed above, we will need to develop new working approaches and modified implementation methodologies to remove or reduce the risks and issues that remote implementations introduce or amplify. At Absolute ERP, we are convinced that this will soon become the implementation mode of choice for many projects and have committed ourselves to develop the necessary tools and techniques to support it. In future posts, I will outline some of the solutions we propose, but in the meantime, if you are interested in discussing this approach further, please e-mail us at info@absoluteerp.com.