

ERP Projects in the Post COVID world - Part 4

Managing Stakeholders during a remote ERP project

Those of you who read my first two posts will know that I believe that once the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic has passed, we will be doing a lot more ERP implementation work remotely. In that post I also proposed benefits to a project being carried out remotely. By way of re-cap, 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

However, 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



Clearly, to gain the benefits I listed above, we will need to develop new working approaches and modified implementation methodologies which remove or mitigate these risks and issues. In the previous articles, I proposed some tools and approaches which the remote functional consultant can use to understand clearly how things are currently done in an organisation and how process workshops can be run remotely, whilst still achieving all their desired objectives. In this fourth and final instalment, I will address the opportunities and risks that remote projects present for project governance and the management of stakeholders.

The task of managing the stakeholders is of vital importance to the success of any ERP project. Many of the well-publicised risk factors stem from this area, and much of the accepted wisdom on avoiding the pitfalls involves the nurturing of strong personal relationships with power-brokers within the business. Since this is made more difficult in a remote project, consultants will need to adopt different strategies going forward. Absolute ERP's **Virtual Workshop Methodology** contains a number of ground-rules to assist with the following key activities.

1. **Role of the remote programme manager.** In an ERP project the programme manager is the bridge between the project team and the senior management, and confidence in the project on both sides is largely equal to the performance of that individual. The remote project can be helpful in equalising the distance between the two groups, enabling the PM to remain independent and maintain a more objective position on key issues. To further enhance this, having formal project

reviews with the team in the days leading up to each steering committee is vital, as is ensuring that the project KPIs encompass both project metrics - % budget spent, project completion – and project content – key decisions made and outstanding, recent tasks completed and those planned for the coming period. It also helps to engage each senior manager at the beginning of the project and record the key objectives and worries that they individually have for the project, and address the status of all these items in any formal communication with that person throughout the project.

2. **Building Rapport with the team.** As part of the project governance, all roles within the remote project team must have explicitly documented responsibilities, which must include an obligation on each person to actively manage their relationships with others in the project. This should include drawing up a list of common interests and focus issues so that each of these can have an agreed objective for each phase of the project. This will ensure that everyone stays informed on the things that matter to them and feels real accountability to deliver on their roles.
3. **Maintaining Commitment and accountability.** One of the problems with remote projects is knowing how much promised resource is being spent by each person on each element of the project. It is therefore critical that an objective time booking system is employed, with daily entries in real time which are validated by the persons opposite number (e.g: Customer Service Key User approves the CRM Consultant and vice-versa). This allows monitoring of:
 - a) Management – are the business resources committing the required and promised amount of quality time to the project, and is progress achieved reflecting the time invested.
 - b) Team members – are they being adequately backfilled, or are day-to-day concerns taking too much priority.
4. **Testing and documentation**

Like all other aspects of the remote project, shared documentation of test plans and test results is vital in allowing each workstream to work collaboratively and independently. We recommend the adoption of a testing database to track this, as shared spreadsheets are cumbersome for this purpose.
5. **Training**

In all projects, getting the balance right between classroom training and private study and practice is vital. In remote projects, the effectiveness of classroom training can vary. Maintaining energy and participation in a virtual training room is hard. The trainer often gets little feedback from the participants and the absence of any clear visual indication of which students are following the topic, and which are struggling, is hard to achieve. This requires that training sessions must be closely linked to periods of private study and 'hands on' practice between group training sessions. This means the provision of appropriate 'homework exercises' and a 'virtual open-door' by the trainer to deal, one-on-one, with user questions and issues.
6. **Other Important Lessons.** Allow a lot of one-to-one or small group discussions and work sessions. A temptation in remote projects is to invite the world into every meeting. In the 'old world', ninety percent of the project progress is made by small groups sitting together and sharing issues and knowledge. This must be allowed to happen remotely too. Good documentation of such meetings and allowing time in the schedule for people to catch up on the decisions and issues in other workstreams are both key contributors in promoting the required behaviour. Also important is ensuring that each person has the equipment and facilities that make this possible. Those working from home need to have a good headset and broadband connection. Those who are office based will need a small, quiet and private area to hold calls, equipped with a PC, personally allocated headset and two screens (allowing screen sharing and video of other participants).

There is much more detail to attend to in ensuring that the stakeholders in a remote ERP project are well informed and supported, but hopefully this list has given food for thought.

I hope you have found this short series of posts helpful and thought provoking. I look forward to the challenge of putting these techniques into practice as part of Absolute ERP's **Virtual Workshop Methodology**. If you are interested in discussing this approach further, please e-mail us at info@absoluteerp.com.