ERP Projects in the Post COVID world - Part 2

Understanding 'how a business really works' remotely

Those of you who read the first of these 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, and in this article, I will propose how we might deal with the first of the 'new issues' above.. that of understanding clearly how things are currently done in an organisation.

An ERP system implementation is a colossal change management challenge for any organisation. Partially pre-packaged systems such as IFS reduce the level of configuration required by the integration team but require more processes to be adapted to suit the 'best practice' they utilise. To ensure that these new approaches fit the requirements of the specific business, the functional consultant needs to have a clear view of how things are currently done. Administrative processes, such as Procurement, Customer Service and HR can readily be understood from a review of the screen sequences and 'as-is' process mapping. Physical processes, however, such as those found in Warehousing and Production are rather different. Here the 'devil is in the detail', and often many of the constraints are not visible from an online view. This usually requires the consultant to 'watch' the machine or process for an extended period of time, and to make frequent visits or tours of the shopfloor or warehouse with workers and supervisors, in order to 'catch' exceptions and special circumstances which will affect the 'to-be' process design. As these actions are often 'second-nature' to the business users, they are unlikely to raise all the variations for analysis.

So, how can we get this same information without being able to visit the factory or warehouse ourselves. Once again, technology can come to our aid here. The approach that **AbsoluteERP** propose as part of its new **Virtual Workshop Methodology**, requires those workers and supervisors who would be touring the factory or warehouse with us to set up a video camera to

record not less than one hour of normal activity in each work centre or department. Obviously, this needs to be introduced carefully to avoid alarming the workforce and initiating unwanted rumours and 'conspiracy theories', though most of us are accustomed to this in the 'old world' anyway, and can be minimised by holding online 'Team briefings' with all the workers in groups beforehand to explain the project plans and objectives.

In addition to these videos, a set of detailed maps and drawings are requested to show the current and proposed future locations of production machines, computers, printers and stock, along with wired and wireless network infrastructure. In many cases these already exist and can be checked and updated to the needs of the project, but if not this will form much of the early work for the in-house project team.

Once these have been collected, the functional consultant can review them in detail and compile two things in preparation for the online workshop meetings:
1. A set of questions to unearth greater detail about why a certain activity is seen taking place.
2. A 'straw-man' proposal for the to-be process in each workshop area to stimulate discussion.

In my next post, I will deal with how our **Virtual Workshop Methodology** manages the online discussions aimed at designing and testing the proposed new processes. In the meantime, if you are interested in discussing this approach further, please e-mail us at info@absoluteerp.com.