11 Steps to a Successful ERP Implementation

Report Highlights

- Selecting the Right ERP Vendor
- Managing Change Effectively
- Putting Your ERP Team Together
- When to Adapt your Business Processes
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Introduction

There are certain truisms in life about which we have no choice but to accept: We will all grow older. We all need nourishment. We all breathe air. There are other truisms that we can choose to accept or ignore: Unhealthy behavior causes early death. Breaking the law means going to jail. Economic independence requires that you spend less than you earn.

Implementing ERP is hard work – maybe the hardest work you will do in your career. That is an example of a truism from the first group. It is inescapable.

The 11 Steps to ERP Success fall into the second group. You can choose to accept or ignore the steps, but that does not change their fundamental truth. Ignoring some of them does not doom you to certain failure, just as not everyone who smokes gets lung cancer. But accepting all of them and acting accordingly will guarantee that you have an implementation that you will be proud of, and look back on, later in your career, as some of your best work.

These steps are not new, or creative; they are the cumulative knowledge of the thousands of ERP implementers who have gone before. Within each success step there are degrees; it not possible to be perfectly successful at all eleven. The intent is to make clear the risks and the benefits such that you can make an informed decision about where you spend your time and resources.

If you find eleven to be an odd number of steps in an otherwise metric world, it is a reminder of one of the biggest challenges you will face as you make your ERP journey: the real world is not a tidy place. Could the list have been twelve? Yes. Could the list have been a top six? Yes. The length of the list is a judgment of where the inflection point occurs for time invested/reward accrued, and how many critical items an average implementation team can effectively manage.

Our eleven have been chosen with these criteria: (a) critical for success (b) require consistent daily effort over a long time period (c) requires strong leadership and interpersonal skills and (d) cannot be “fixed” after the fact by throwing money or people at the problem.

The last point is the most compelling. After go-live, you are on a implementation trajectory which is difficult to change. You are prepared or you are not; your end users are ready or they are not; your solutions work or they don’t. Either way, you are committed. The ERP bell cannot be un-rung.

How will history judge your implementation? As a well oiled machine, or a litigation waiting to happen? Implementing ERP well is a difficult, but not impossible task. It requires not only that you work hard, but that you work hard on the right things.

The eleven steps that follow guide you in what those right things are.

The ERPFocus.com Editorial Team
Vendor Selection

The choice of vendor for your ERP software is critically important to the success of your project. A good fit for your industry and business ensures a relatively smooth transition from old to new. Solutions which are efficient and intuitive speed up the learning process, foster the sense of ERP being an improvement, and contribute to organizational confidence. ERP software vendors need to be evaluated along dual pathways. The first is the more obvious one; is their ERP product the right fit for your industry and business model? The second is less tangible, and therefore more difficult to evaluate: is the vendor’s culture the right fit for your culture? Determining the fit of the software product for your business is the more important decision, but should also be the most objective. Unless you are hoping to secure some sort of strategic advantage with an unusual ERP solution, “tried-and-true” should be your rule. Your vendor should be able to put users in front of you from your industry who make you feel positive about the strengths of the product. If you cannot find exact industry overlap, then find process similarity, but in any case, talk to people who have used that particular ERP product over time. Construct a basic numerical scorecard around the critical features/deliverables you need, and use it –and trust it - when comparing products. Be careful when someone with no particular track record in your industry tries to buy market entry with a noticeably low asking price, and remember that there is no amount of money in your company sufficient to fix a bad ERP solution. Pick a vendor who you judge will be around for a while, and supports on-going development for your product.

Trust your Antennae

Evaluating vendor culture is trickier. Bear in mind that there are going to be two very distinct phases to your relationship with your ERP software vendor. During the sales cycle, you will be the most important person in the world. There will be no request too large, and no question too small that does not elicit an almost obsequious response. After the sale, though, the actual business relationship begins, and that is the relationship that you must do your best to gauge. You should feel positive about your vendors; that they are ethical, honest, and would never intentionally mislead you. You should feel like they consider your well-being important, and that you will be able to work together through unexpected problems. Don’t over think this one, and trust your instincts. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s probably a duck.

Selecting an ERP vendor is a big, strategically important decision. Involve as many peers and viewpoints as you can possibly manage. Feel good about being able to articulate the reasoning for your choice, numerically if possible. Don’t expose yourself to risks without commensurate rewards. Picking the right software vendor is a huge step toward to ERP success.
Choosing an Implementation Consultant

Depending on the size and scope of your ERP implementation, you may be faced with choosing a vendor to provide a consulting team for your implementation. Not every ERP project requires a full time consultant team. Whether or not you need consultants depends on how much in house knowledge you have about your ERP software (and to what extent that software can be self-taught); how much time you have to complete the project; and how many modules and end users you are trying to implement at one time. If you do determine that you need some ERP implementation consultants to guide you through the unfamiliar process of an implementation, then selecting the right implementation partner becomes as crucial to your success as selecting the right software vendor.

Like software vendors, ERP implementation consultants need to be evaluated both in terms of product and culture. The concept of “product” may seem less tangible for a consulting group, but if you listen to multiple sales presentations, you will begin to recognize differences in process that create product differentiation. Some consultants will stress project management skills; some will focus on their ability to create an atmosphere of collaboration and consensus building; others may define themselves as being the most technically competent. The problem you face is in defining what product you are really looking for. If you are looking for consultants as teachers, you may choose a different vendor than if you are looking for consultants as technicians.

A Marriage Made In Heaven Or….

Evaluating the culture of an ERP consulting company is perhaps even more critical than evaluating their product. An implementation consulting team is the business equivalent of a shotgun wedding; one day a bunch of people show up, sit in your area with you, and start making suggestions on how to do things. There will be growing pains around who should lead, and who should follow; awkwardness around when to accept an answer at face value, and when to require background reasoning; uncomfortable personality clashes; and some amount of inevitable friction. There is no absolute science on what makes an ERP consulting group the right fit for your organization; you just look for clues. If you are seeking a partnership, and the consulting group seems rather arrogant and dismissive of your naïve questions, you cross them off the list and move on.

There is a third option, and that is to subcontract and manage independent ERP consultants by yourself. This is not for the faint of heart, however, and in general the risks outweigh the rewards, unless you have previous ERP project management experience.

If you pick a good ERP consulting vendor, and the partnership builds smoothly, it is a thing of beauty and an enormous boost for the success of your project. In these cases, the relative strengths of each group combine to create a whole which is greater than the sum of the parts. There is comfort and strength, in traveling the ERP implementation path with someone who has traveled it before.
Change management

In matters of faith, it is a close call between which requires more: your belief in a deity of choice as part of your spiritual health, or your belief in change management as part of your ERP project's health. It is largely a matter of faith because it is difficult to objectively observe or measure change readiness. Still, a wise and consistent investment in change management will be one of your most important contributions to your project’s success.

Most of us, in our business careers, have managed changed similarly to the way we have been managed: simply making speedy adoption of a new initiative a condition of employment. However, ERP is so large, and touches so many people, that this approach is not numerically feasible; you couldn’t realistically fire that many people and keep the organization operating. The only logical alternative is to manage them in such a way that, even if they are not positive about ERP, they are at least accepting of the change, and understand its business reasons.

What is Change Management?

What exactly is this process, meant to ensure that the host does not reject the organ? We hear the phrase “change management” and it sounds pretty intuitive, until we try to write down the five action steps we are going to take in order to successfully prepare people for the change. That’s when we realize we don’t really have a clue about what change management is or how to accomplish it. The good news – and most critical thing to remember – is that the way people come to believe things and form opinions is both consistent and predictable. By managing to those predictabilities in terms of timing and content, the normal discomfort associated with change on the scale of an ERP project can be reduced to manageable levels.

If it is your first time attempting to proactively manage change, you should probably invest in a training course, or hire a consultant, just to reinforce that you have valid, effective process. The key steps on your journey to change are (1) Identify everyone who will be affected by the change (this is a bigger group than you will initially think) (2) Communicate to this group what change will be coming (3) Establish the compelling business reasons that make ERP necessary (4) Explain how they must behave in order for the project to succeed and (5) Give frequent project updates, always reiterating steps two through four. If it ever feels to you like you are over communicating, or that your audience could give your presentation because they’ve heard it so many times, you are exactly where you want to be.

There is no question that on one level, ERP is a technical project, requiring intelligent design, seamless logic, and sophisticated math. But no matter how robust the solution, ERP will only be successful if people embrace it and use it as designed. That behavior will not occur without change management effort.
Data Cleansing

Ask any veteran of an ERP implementation to cite critical success factors, and you will always hear “data cleansing” near the top of the list. Then ask those same veterans to identify the top two or three tasks that they most underestimated, in terms of scope and complexity, and see if “data cleansing” does not also make that list as well. Let’s talk about why data cleansing is important to ERP success, and some tips to improve your approach.

Data cleansing is a huge factor in ERP success because it is leveraged in every phase of the operation. An ERP implementation will be exactly as successful as its testing execution, and the only limitation on testing execution is master data completeness and accuracy. An ERP implementation will be exactly as successful as its training program, and effective ERP training requires master data completeness and accuracy. An ERP implementation will be exactly as successful as its synchronization of business data at go-live, and that synchronization requires master data completeness and accuracy. Every success that occurs has complete and accurate master data as a prerequisite.

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

There are three primary reasons that people underestimate the task of data cleansing, which, if avoided, will make your ERP implementation better: (1) because master data is usually dispersed among multiple systems in legacy, people rarely appreciate how much of it there is; (2) some data cleansing ends up being an iterative process, which creates a bit of a Catch-22 – you can’t test without master data, and the reason for the test is to evaluate master data; and (3) it is extremely difficult to objectively measure progress on data cleansing, particularly in light of number 2; data that you might have considered cleansed and complete does not test well, and suddenly it becomes “uncleansed”.

But to be forewarned is to be forearmed, so with this knowledge, there are lots of steps you can take to improve the data cleansing process: (1) Make progress where you can. Some data will take time to accumulate, but in the meantime, you can recognize that you have addresses on “South Main Street”, “South Main St.” and “S. Main Street” and “S. Main St.” and work on fixing those. Look for zip code and city mismatches. (2) Schedule routine data cleansing review meetings, and be relentless about probing for bottlenecks and problem areas. (3) Establish an aggressive completion plan – which you probably will not hit – but invest the time to understand exactly why you are not hitting it. (4) Assign the right people to the task. Smart, hard working, detail-oriented people – match the right skills with the job need.

Unlike most of an ERP implementation, the lessons learned, and the processes created for data cleansing become part of an organization’s DNA; complete and accurate master data will be as essential for success two years after go live as it is on day 1. Make it part of your ERP success story.
Leadership Commitment

Having a committed executive group is an important key to ERP implementation success. If everybody in the organization can see that the C-level, the steering team, and the executive sponsors are aligned around a successful ERP launch, they will behave likewise, which will allow you to focus your attention on other key success factors. On the other hand, if middle management senses that they can drive a wedge between the implementation team and the executive group, the environment will be akin to a feeding frenzy among sharks, and you will find a disproportionate amount of your time attending review meetings, defending the decisions you have made.

It should not require a Herculean effort to achieve and maintain leadership commitment. The fact that there is an ERP project means that there was sufficient interest and commitment to fund the strategically important initiative even though ERP has a reputation of medium to high risk, and difficult-to-quantify benefits. The objective, then, is to nurture and grow that original support, without anything visible happening for several months.

However, as design sessions make it becomes obvious that ERP will require change, communications from lower ranks up through higher ranks creates successive embellishments such that executive leadership will hear that “ERP is going to destroy our business”. Obviously, this type of hyperbole is generally not created by maliciousness, but simple fear of change. So, to ensure that leadership remains confident and supportive of the ERP effort you should take these proactive steps:

1. Try to be the first to communicate process change decisions. This is not always easy; especially if you are on routine monthly or bi-weekly review cycles. If you write well, make use of emails during the intervals; if not pick up the phone. The critical point is to make certain that decisions are explained in terms of sound business judgment. If your explanation is not compelling, it may not be a good decision.

2. Try to always present executives with a bigger picture narrative when possible. To the extent that you can arrange numerous tactical ERP decisions into a strategic picture with implications, you will engage executives in their comfort zone.

3. Solicit executive feedback and do not be defensive if you receive it. Your goal is to remain tightly aligned with the executive leadership, and that will only happen if they are confident that you can listen to and respond to their concerns. Also, this keeps them involved in decision-making; you want them to think of these as “our decisions” not “your decisions”.

If your executive leadership remains steadfastly committed, middle management will quickly sense that attempts at sensationalism are a waste of time, and will refocus their efforts on more productive endeavors. This in turn, allows you to focus your time on more productive tasks. Keep your leadership group aligned around and enthused about the project, and your probability of success goes up significantly.
Team Talent

To cite “assembling the right team” as a key ERP success factor seems as obvious as saying the key to growing your business is to increase your revenue, or the key to wealth accumulation is to earn more than you spend. Yet every ERP project manager will have to fight – and usually compromise – for access to the right talent.

The talent an organization assigns to its ERP team demonstrates to a large degree its commitment to, and comprehension of, long term organization health. Five years after the implementation of a mediocre ERP system, it is of no value to regret assigning mediocre talent to the effort. A talented implementation team sees the big picture more completely, appreciates the implications of the strategic plan better, evaluates decisions not only in terms of what is today, but what is likely to become tomorrow, and has the professional capital and organizational respect to sell difficult, but necessary process changes.

So what are some of the indicators of good talent when evaluating individuals for implementation team participation? First, if possible, individuals should be seen as promotable. People who are promotable have less allegiance to the status quo, and will later populate the organization’s higher ranks with fundamental understanding of how the business processes were designed. Secondly, an individual who has high personal intelligence is nice, but an individual who has high team intelligence is a necessity. Being personally smart has nothing to do with – and can occasionally interfere with – being team smart. Being team smart means you recognize the point of consensus, and do not belabor a conversation beyond that point; it means that you do not steer conversations in interesting, but unimportant directions; it means that the quality of a decision is evaluated solely on its effect to the organization; it means that whatever personal ego you have is left at home where you can conveniently pick it up after work. A third attribute is depth of understanding. Talented people not only understand what is required, they understand why it is required, and this comprehension is incredibly valuable when it comes to determining what business practices are subject to change and which are not. And finally, the most intangible, is the ability to listen to multiple points of view, and assimilate the best parts of all into a solution that is better than any.

If you assemble a strong team, everything about the project goes better. Change management is more effective because the team members have credibility. Testing goes better because the test scenarios are chosen wisely, and executed intelligently. Fewer milestones are missed, as team members are used to accepting additional responsibility, and pitch in to help wherever needed.

There are many factors that influence the success of an ERP implementation, and team talent is one of the biggest. A highly talented team alone does not ensure that your implementation will be world-class, but mediocre talent alone will ensure that you have a mediocre implementation.
Testing

It would be easy to expect that after tens of thousands of business implementations, ERP software ought to be mature enough to just run the “install wizard”, go get a cup of coffee, and come back to a completed ERP system. Unfortunately, ERP systems are so flexible and complex that a huge success factor for an ERP implementation is aggressive and extensive testing.

Testing requires more than just assigning manpower. It is an iterative process, which means not only testing, but evaluating problems, and fixing things. It means having valid master data available to support the test, and understanding the process you are testing. It means testing development objects, and how they interact with everything else. It means having a dedicated test client, which can be controlled and monitored. Each test leads to a bigger test, so there is a natural progression of testing sophistication over the course of an implementation.

After initial configuration is completed, all planned transactions are tested for simple transactional validity: I can enter a sales order; I can report production; I can place a purchase order. Some problems will emerge from these tests requiring revision and re-testing. This level of testing is done on an individual basis, with each functional team understanding that all of their transactions need to be successfully tested by a given milestone date.

Shortly after this milestone date, the first round of integration testing should be scheduled. “Integration testing” in this case, means testing an entire business process, from initial input to final output. An integration test is a scripted arrangement of the ten to sixty sequential transactions required to execute a specific process in the real world. The key to making this phase successful is to identify the right fifteen to thirty scripts that represent 90% of the business processes, and working hard on process improvements until they all execute smoothly.

The next round of integration tests involves subject matter experts and super users. During this round of tests, random but real world data is introduced. The randomness ensures that the right processes were identified in integration test one; using real world data allows business participants to help evaluate the output. During this round of testing, master data must be well developed, because the ability to enter real orders with real customers means that master data is available to feed the process.

Subsequent rounds of integration tests try to rehearse and execute a go-live, including synchronization of inventory, sales orders, purchase orders and production orders, and replicating one hundred percent of the activity of a business for a given time period.

Every test cycle teaches, uncovers problems, and makes go-live more manageable. Eventually, an inflection point occurs during testing which is incredibly important for a team’s morale and attitude; it is the realization that the team is certain of a successful go-live. That knowledge and confidence – which can only come from repeated and successful testing - is essential to an implementation’s success.
User Testing

One of the best ways to increase the likelihood of an ERP implementation success is with an effective end user training process. There are several levels of escalating contribution that can result from a well-executed end user training program.

Ensuring that on day one, everyone can logon to the new system, get to the transactions they need to do their jobs, and have the knowledge to execute the transactions by themselves is the most basic level of success. Without this baseline of competency, there is no question the effort would fail. This level of competency can only occur if the end users have received effective educational instruction, and have been asked to practice applying what they have learned.

The second tier of end user training success is to have some end users sufficiently trained so that they can participate effectively in volume testing leading up to go live. These people contribute beyond their task participation because they bring real world eyes to problems to which the implementation team may have grown blind. They recognize what areas of training are going to be especially problematic. Also, they can look at system output and in a glance spot common sense errors that a team unfamiliar with the day-to-day data might overlook.

Find Your Problem Solvers

The highest benefit of end user training is to increase the effective size of the problem-solving team at go-live. “Problem solvers” are helpful, positive energy contributors to an effort; much more valuable than the more common “problem identifier”, who are content to throw a problem over the wall to the implementation team, and then walk away from it. The best way to increase the number of problem solvers is to identify individuals during training who either show unusually quick comprehension of the material, or unusual curiosity, and to give those people additional training and mentoring.

All of these levels require a consistent and logical education process. Everyone in the organization who will touch ERP must be identified by name and job function. Every transaction required for that function must be identified, and assembled into an appropriate security role. Training material must be prepared, and sufficient practice problems set up so that everyone can engage in hands-on practice. Different types of transactions require different amounts of preparation and master data. With five valid customers and five valid materials, you can create dozens of different sales orders, but you can’t report production unless you have a work order and sufficient inventory of all components. Instructors must be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and patient. Training must be timed for shortly before implementation, or else retention goes down dramatically.

Getting the maximum number of people competently trained in ERP for go live is an incredible boost for success. The need to conduct training occurs during the exact same time frame that anxiety about go-live is peaking. Keep everyone focused on the prize; training is a key success factor.
Spending Wisely

An oft-repeated rule of thumb is that an ERP implementation will cost you twice as much as you planned for by the time you are finished. Without a doubt, it is easy to overspend an ERP budget. However, barring a significant increase in scope, and assuming a reasonable budget, arrived at through collaboration with your IT department, software vendor, and implementation consultants, there is no reason you cannot stay close to budget and use your funding for a very successful implementation.

The first success tip is to warn you that you will become wildly popular overnight. Remember that this is because you are managing an enormous budget, and not because those Dale Carnegie classes are finally paying off. After a while, you will learn to just skip the unexpected invitation to lunch, and ask what the request is. It is a necessary skill to learn to say “no” to a request for money without saying “no” to your working relationship.

The second success tip is to have a well-defined training plan for your implementation, development, and basis teams. Without a written plan that targets specific objectives, you will end up over spending on education, as there is almost always a compelling argument for each individual class.

The next spending success tip is to think of your budget as a flow of money over time – from kick off to two months after go live, and your job is to set up a monthly flow that spends seventy-five percent of your budget after all other known expenses are accounted for. Your implementation plan is going to consist of hundreds of tasks that can be categorized into “needs” and “wants”. If the seventy-five per cent money covers all of your needs and wants, you are golden – there will be few difficult choices. If the seventy-five per cent number covers all of your needs, but not all of your wants, then you have to discard enough from your want list to arrive at a spending flow that keeps you in budget. If the seventy-five per cent does not cover your needs, then you either need to reduce scope, or decide where to intelligently increase your risk. Monthly spending is overwhelmingly a function of people, and the easiest way to make adjustments is to reduce consultants and add highly talented people from within your organization. Generally speaking, you will be able to pay two or three internal people for every consultant you can do without.

Lastly, use that final twenty five percent surplus budget in the last six weeks before go-live and first six weeks after. There will be unexpected problems, and that is when you need the flexibility to spend money aggressively, and wisely, in order to quell rumors, and find speedy resolutions to emotional problems. Once people recognize that problems are being corrected quickly confidence soars, and the probability of success takes a stair step up.
Adapting Business Processes

One of the most difficult tasks you will undertake in your pursuit of a successful ERP implementation is knowing when to change a business process to conform to out-of-the-box ERP, and when it is essential to customize ERP to preserve a strategic business process advantage. The reason it is a difficult task is because while there will be very few business processes that actually represent a strategic advantage, you will encounter one hundred per cent resistance to changing any of them.

An example of adapting a business process might be: Suppose that you print advertising brochures, and because of the high cost of set up, you always over produce by 5%, since the cost of an overage is small compared to the cost of a shortage, and you’ve always simply given the overage to the customer. This won’t work in ERP, for a variety of reasons. So do you change your practices, or change ERP?

ERP systems have been developed and refined by observing best business practices and incorporating them into the design; if you have a non-conforming process then it’s likely not a best practice. Yet, you will face opposition to changing, because somebody is going to have to do something they don’t want to do; marketing won’t want to bill customers for product they didn’t order, production will not accept being charged with 5% scrap, and planning can’t afford the risk of shortages.

So how do you win and be successful? First, you have to mentally separate yourself from your peers and friends, even though you fully understand their concerns. Then you have to ask yourself if this thing you are debating is a fundamentally good business practice. In the example above, imagine yourself asking the CEO for permission to customize ERP, so that you can give product away efficiently. At this point, you know what the right answer is, and your responsibility to the success of the project is to be the one with the courage and perseverance to say, “No.”

On the other hand, suppose ERP didn’t handle an on-line design feature where customers could lay out their own brochures and send a completed design to you over the web for printing. You would probably feel okay asking permission to customize ERP for that; it is a strategic business advantage.

These situations can be emotionally draining. When a sales manager is in your face, adamant that your decision is going to ensure that she does not hit her annual quota, it is intimidating, even if you know it is not true. Keep in mind that your organization did not invent business. In addition to all of the tangible advantages ERP brings to the table, create an additional success out of knowledge that your ERP package represents the norm for business practices, and you have the opportunity to quietly correct some bad business habits.
Defining Success

Defining success for an IT project seems to be inherently more difficult than defining successful financial expectations, or manufacturing objectives. Yet without an articulated set of post go-live expectations, the success of an ERP implementation becomes a matter of opinion – and in the worst case, a matter of infinite opinions. If an organization is lazy, and adopts a default metric of how many people are bitching about the new ERP system, then almost all implementations would be deemed failures. It is essential for the focus of the implementation team, for the health of the organization, and for appropriate allocation of resources that a set of measurable criteria be put into place prior to go-live which are the final arbiters of ERP success.

Think Achievable

Unless your implementation is within the aerospace industry, your success definition does not need to be rocket science. The litmus test of a sufficient definition is one that, no matter what else additional happens or is said, you will feel the implementation was well done. For example, a simple success statement could be “Convert over to ERP”. But if you couldn’t ship anything the first two days, would you be disappointed? If so, how about “Convert to ERP with no significant business disruption”. That’s better. How about “Convert to ERP with no significant business disruption and no negative impacts on external customers.” That’s even more specific, and leads to discussion about whether the correct phrase is “no negative impacts” or “no ERP-related negative impacts”.

It is also perfectly acceptable if success criteria are time phased, and represent a sequentially higher bar over time. For instance, an end of week #1 objective might be to have no more late orders than the average over the past twelve weeks. (If you do not have success criteria that take history into account, then the historical 20% late that you have always had will suddenly become 20% late because of ERP). An end of week #2 objective might be to have a reduction in late orders, have received no customer complaints as a result of the ERP objective, and to be billing at historical weekly averages. An end of week #3 objective might be all of the week #2 objectives plus no raw material or intermediate shortages. An end of week #4 objective might be all of weeks one through three, plus initial distribution of daily business activity reports. And so on.

The critical point is, a successful organization will have consensus on what constitutes success. It is well documented that if you administer random shocks to lab animals, eventually the animals simply retreat to a corner, and do not move, awaiting the next random shock. If an ERP team is allowed to be randomly criticized for failing to achieve unarticulated objectives, they will end up retreating to a metaphorical corner. Tell the ERP team how to be successful, and then congratulate them when they are.
Conclusion

If you’ve read and thought about each of the eleven success steps, you are probably feeling a combination of intimidation and disbelief. Intimidation because this stuff is hard work, and almost none of it is something for which many people have natural skill or previous training. Disbelief because, after a while, it seems like this is an awful lot of to-do about a software implementation.

If you take nothing else from this white paper, believe that these success steps are real and necessary. Underestimating the difficulty of an ERP implementation is a grave mistake. Find people who have been down a road like ERP before, and whose opinions you trust – IT professionals, consulting partners, software vendors, other project managers – and ask them if the items on this list are critical for your project success.

Stay intimidated every single day of your implementation project. Do not be paralyzed with fear; just remain respectful of the multitude of ways in which your project can derail, and use that respect to motivate the effort to make sure it doesn’t. Learn early on who you can trust without reservation to help you with these steps, and lean on these people heavily.

By now, you recognize that these eleven success steps are much more of a philosophical anchor than task items than can be crossed off a “to do” list. Every day, every decision and interaction is passed through a filter of what will make the team stronger, what will make the end users more prepared, what will keep the leadership committed, and how we can test this idea. You automatically reject solutions that are not consistent with the success steps, and by so doing, people learn to create success-oriented solutions. You make certain everyone can see you staying involved in the change management, data cleansing, and business process change efforts.

The paradox you face is that even though you have no training or previous experience – no compelling qualifications at all – people expect that you will have a successful implementation. The only logical way out of this paradox is for you to assimilate as quickly as possible the cumulative knowledge of the many who have also done what you are doing, and by doing so, begin building your qualifications.

Because an ERP implementation is difficult does not mean it cannot be both fun and create an enormous sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Being a good ERP project manager doesn’t create a massive fan base like being a rock star or a major league baseball player does, but the people you work with will understand what you did, and how you did it. Adopt the steps that have made other people successful, and always keep your eye on the goal of your own successful go live.

We hope your own ERP journey is a great success!

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