

Five Keys for Easier ERP Deployments

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Don't panic.

That might be the famous advice from the Douglas Adams series, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, but it also is words of wisdom for those entrusted with deploying a new ERP system for their business.

"ERP implementations have been perceived as difficult for as long as we've had ERPs," admits Eva Schoenleitner, vice president of product marketing for industrial ERP provider, Sage. "Issues such as adequate training, finding the perfect ERP vendor, data quality and getting full commitment and support from top management continue to remain challenges."



Yes, ERP deployments are complex and challenging. But there are ways to make such deployments significantly easier. So stay calm, and follow these five keys for an easier ERP deployment project.

1. Work from Outcomes

Making ERP systems work for users is critically important. But so is business objectives. So when deploying a new ERP system, start by understanding what your business is trying to accomplish with the ERP system and then work back to how it can empower individual users.

"Ultimately, you won't achieve your goals if your user experience, your business processes, your screens and the data you are collecting aren't in line with achieving the goals," says Jenny Peng, chief technology officer for enterprise software provider, Aptean. "There needs to be a direct, linear correlation between the user's experience, their expectation, and your goals."

2. Follow the Five Phases

The five major phases of a good ERP rollout include project launch, designing, executing, validating the implementation and then going live with the system, according to Schoenleitner at Sage.

Clearly define each phase and match progress against these phases.

“At the end of each phase, have a milestone checkpoint meeting with project leaders to ensure that all target deliverables and activities have been completed before transitioning to the next phase of the project,” she says.

The project steering committee, comprised of key stakeholders within your company as well as the ERP professional service team, should provide oversight throughout the implementation to ensure compliance with project objectives. In Addition, the project governance performed by the ERP project manager in collaboration with your team should ensure effective management of the project schedule and deliverables at each step.

3. Create a Culture of Change

Technical deployment is only half the battle. The real key for a successful deployment is getting buy-in from employees tasked with using the system.

“Invest in cultural transformation and change management of your ERP system as much as you invest in the technology of ERP,” advises Peng at Aptean. “If your people are not prepared and haven’t embraced it fully, then you will fail in ERP implementation.”

She adds that all users have to buy into the application and the understanding that it will make their daily work faster and easier. Fail at this, and fail at adoption.

4. Get Executive Buy-in

Part of driving buy-in and adoption among employees is having strong support from senior leadership.

“If leaders are not talking about the impact of the ERP system to everyone in the organization, there will be pushback from the user community,” says Peng.

“Senior leaders need to be visible and vocal in their utilization of and their support of the ERP system with it being the single source of truth from which they leverage data as they are facilitating business performance conversations,” she says.

It also is important that you have strong support from senior management because ERP deployment is a significant project with many opportunities for delay and project creep. Without full, enthusiastic support from management and a clear understanding of the importance of the ERP system, these delays and issues can easily derail the work.

5. Think Cloud All the Way (If Possible)

Many ERP deployments are complex weaves of on-premise technology and both public and private cloud infrastructure. Consider going entirely for a cloud foundation if feasible. This can greatly reduce complexity and deployment headaches.

“A requirement to move toward a hybrid cloud and on-premise deployment through a cloud-to-cloud-to-ground integration can increase complexity,” stresses Peng.

While cloud-based ERP systems sometimes come with reduced flexibility over their on-premise brethren, the tradeoff usually is worth it.

“A move to the cloud helps to achieve a faster and more efficient deployment of the ERP system, shortening the time to realize ROI and benefits,” says Peng. “Also, with the ERP application hosted in the cloud, the ERP vendor takes ownership of what is required to keep the infrastructure up to date, thus freeing up the end user’s time to focus on other business needs.”

So don’t panic. Lay the right foundation with strong planning, execute against the five phases of a good ERP deployment, think cloud, and most importantly get buy-in from all stakeholders early in the process. This can greatly reduce the challenges you’ll face when rolling out your new ERP system.

While Douglas Adams might also add to bring your towel, we’ll forego that advice because these five keys hopefully will make deployment no sweat.

About the Author



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