Companies must allow for ERP training's hidden costs and complexities

By Lyndsey Moorhouse   10 Feb 2014

End-user training and education is key to the success of any large enterprise IT project, especially the deployment of a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution.

Yet all too many companies still treat it as one-line item in their implementation budgets. They fail to provide for the technical challenges, business complexities and costs of equipping their staff with the competencies they need to drive business benefit from ERP systems.

As a result, many organisations watch the costs of implementation swell beyond their initial budgets, while delivery of business value lags their expectations. As they struggle to turn the project around, they may even begin to question the wisdom of embarking on it in the first place. But this can all be avoided if companies start out with a clear understanding of the organisation-wide impact of ERP training and education.

Let's look at the demands that ERP education places on eight different teams, departments and functions within the organisation:

The IT department

The IT department will be one of the business areas most profoundly impacted by the training requirements of an ERP project. It will be expected to set up an instance of the software to be used for training - and this might mean extra costs in hardware, software licences and human resources.

IT will also need to keep this training system backed-up and ensure it changes in lock-step with configuration changes in the development environment. If the company is going the e-learning route, IT might need to provision for hardware and network capacity for the storage and distribution of online learning materials.

Training

The training group will be swamped with work during the switch to a new ERP system. It will need to source and test course content. In addition, the training department will need to set up permissions on the learning management system and load course curricula and content for user groups. It will need to assess and evaluate the training and the end-users' progress in learning relevant skills and knowledge.

And then, of course, the training department will manage the nitty-gritty of the training process, including end-user and trainer competence, quality control over courses, monitoring attendance, updating materials, and ensuring sustainability of end-user training in the organisation after the system goes live.

Authorisations team

This team will need to set up and maintain authorisation profiles for trainers and groups of end-users.

Data team

The data team will need to create and maintain realistic clean data on the training instance - often earlier than the project requires it.

Testing team

This team will need to provide test scripts that contain the business scenarios that form the basis of the training material and processes.

Business process mapping team

Accurate, fully documented business process maps and the associated business rules will be essential for the training project - and providing them will be up to the business process mapping team. This team will also need to provide quality assurance on materials and delivery for business process training.

Logistics and support

There are many hidden logistics and support costs involved in ERP training - printing of materials, booking and equipping rooms, procuring software licences, and travel and accommodation costs for trainees and trainers are just a few examples.

SMEs and functional consultants

They'll have an important role to play in providing lists of the functionality that needs to be included in the training material. They'll also need to do quality assurance and sign off on the materials.

Don't get trapped by hidden costs

As these examples show, supporting a large-scale ERP training effort is almost as complex and wide in its organisational impact as is implementing the ERP solution. In addition to many costs that many companies fail to provide for, ERP training makes enormous demands on the time of already-busy people spread throughout the organisation.

The good news is that companies who start with a clear view of the challenges and costs of training can manage them effectively. The trick is to build training and education time and costs into the project plan right from the start - this will allow for optimal use of resources and better alignment of the new technology and processes with the people who will use them. By scoping realistic training costs and timeframes right from the start, an organisation can put itself on course for a successful project from the outset.

ABOUT LYNDSEY MOORHOUSE

As Can!Do's managing director, Lyndsey Moorhouse oversees the delivery of high-impact ERP education solutions that help companies drive real ROI from their investments into applications. Lyndsey has been working in the ERP end-user education and change field for 20 years, 10 of those with Can!do Consulting. During this time, she has held trainer, team lead, project manager, change consultant, strategic training consultant operations management roles on a range of projects for blue-chip clients.

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