

LEADING THE WAY

Preston D. Cameron explains how you can seamlessly introduce a new enterprise system.

BY KERRI WESTENBERG

Like any change that affects an entire company, the introduction of a new software system can be unsettling. The thought of disrupting business as usual is daunting. Preston D. Cameron, a consultant with Experio Solutions, the sixth-largest management consulting firm in North America, agrees:

"Nothing will change corporate culture, structure and process more than a new enterprisewide system implementation."

Fortunately, there are ways to ensure a successful shift, and Cameron, who for years has helped companies select and introduce software systems, knows the tricks. To tap his expertise, *Projects@Work* talked with him about the subject of an upcoming workshop, "Large Scale Systems Implementation," which he will present at ProjectWorld in Chicago in September.

Projects@Work: What should a company consider when it contemplates a large-scale systems implementation?

Cameron: Decision makers need to assess the proposed implementation as it relates to their vision, mission and business strategy. Vision describes what the managers want the business to become; mission defines what they hope to accomplish; and strategy is how they are going to accomplish the mission. If the proposed new technology doesn't support those three things, undertaking the large-scale implementation doesn't make sense.

P@W: Once a company decides to go ahead, how should it devise a game plan?

Cameron: Ideally, an organization should start planning for implementation during the process of selecting the vendor. The real key to success,

however, is a project manager. As soon as the implementation decision is made, the company should assign a manager who will be responsible for the project from conceptual design and software selection to its final implementation.

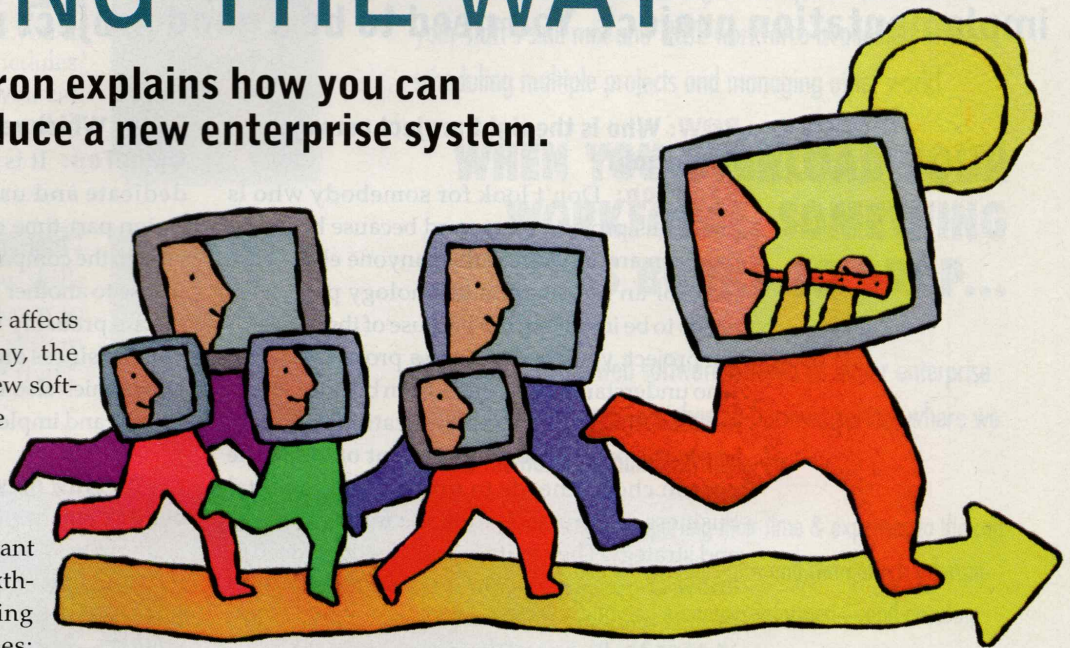
P@W: Why is a project manager important?

Cameron: He or she can continually look back at the key business drivers that caused the company to introduce new technology in the first place. The project manager will be able to assess whether the project is on track. Many companies get so caught up in the implementation of the moment that they forget to go back and assess whether they are going to achieve their ultimate goal; seven out of 10 times that's where a project gets into trouble.

Steps to Success

Certain company characteristics can help ensure a smooth large-scale systems implementation. Cameron outlines some of them here. Does your organization have what it takes?

- A culture that supports change.
- A can-do attitude up and down the ladder.
- Empowered employees who make good, quick decisions.
- An acceptance of the project's limitations.
- A willingness to dedicate resources for the long term.



You don't need to know about large-scale systems to manage an implementation project. You need to be a good project manager.

P@W: Who is the right project manager for the job?

Cameron: Don't look for somebody who is given this project as a reward because he or she has been around longer than anyone else. Don't look for an information technology person. IT needs to be involved, but because of the nature of the project, you need to have a project manager who understands and comes from business operations. Otherwise, your organization will come to see the project from an IT point of view. The person chosen needs to understand the total business picture, including the mission, vision and strategy. The reality is that you don't need to know about large-scale systems to be a good project manager on an implementation project. You need to be a good project manager.

P@W: In addition to finding the right project manager, what are the other factors that will ensure success?

Cameron: Don't rush the process any faster than your organization can go. For example, some organizations rush to get enterprisewide systems in as a launching pad for enhanced customer relationships or business development and infrastructure. They often try to do it faster than the organization can respond.



MEET THE SPEAKER

P@W: Which resources do you choose?

Cameron: It is vital that companies assign, dedicate and use the right resources. Don't assign part-time resources. Pick people who are vital to the company, those you could least afford to lose to another job or organization. Those people are probably right because they understand your business and have the right background. Companies also need to find the right software vendor and implementation partner.

P@W: How do you find the right software vendor and implementation partner?

Cameron: Whether it is the software vendor, a consultant or a third-party consulting firm, you have to find people who have in-depth knowledge. The right partner should have experience with the software, having implemented it a lot, especially with organizations of your size and in the same industry.

P@W: What are the most common pitfalls in implementing an enterprise system?

Cameron: One is that companies pick the wrong software. Another is that they try to cut back the cost of the implementation by reducing the amount of knowledge transfer and training. That comes back to bite the organization, because after implementation, few of the employees know how to use the software.

Another pitfall is that a company often fails to start converting data when the selection process begins. At that point, the company should start to think about what data to keep and what to toss. Another drawback is a lack of communication among everyone involved in the project, both inside and outside the company.

P@W: What can the right project manager do to avoid these pitfalls?

Cameron: A good project manager has to be able to communicate up and down the organization, explaining roadblocks to key decision makers, project sponsors and the executive steering committees in order to solicit their involvement. There is a natural link between management attentiveness to the project and the project manager's ability to inspire that interest. ■

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