Package Implementation

Putting your best foot forward

"Give me a lever, and I shall turn the world." **-** said Archimedes.

"Give me the perfect package, and I shall implement it ," said the IT manager.

Increasingly, insurance companies are implementing enterprise-wide packages. As an insurer how do you start converting a selected package to a successful implementation ?

It is often thought that the key to a successful package implementation project is a great package: flexible, friendly, and fast to implement. But a closer look reveals that the same package in almost the same environment – the same country, the same industry – often has different results in different implementations.

In the case of a well-known Fortune 500 company, two teams of implementers came up with dramatically different preliminary results. One team claimed the package could not be implemented and recommended building a solution in-house; the other claimed that the package could be implemented without any customization in 6 months. Management chose the second option, and were rewarded with success.

Without denying the need for an appropriate package, it is worth noting that numerous cases have shown the secret to success does not lie in the package alone. Like Archimedes' quest for the fixed point with which the world could be turned, the IT manager's quest for the perfect package is doomed to failure. After the package has been chosen, it is important to move forward with pragmatism.

Most companies recognise that after selection, it is important not to lose momentum. So, it is common to start the implementation project immediately. What is often ignored is that this is the period which affects the project more than any other period. Because it is at this stage that the critical factors are decided.

1. **The processes** : The project organisation structure, and responsibilities of each role are defined. This includes the role of the project sponsor, steering committee, the core team, project manager, the vendors, and implementation consultants.

A key focus area - often ignored at this stage - is the change management processes. There is a tendency to assume that the project will proceed without requiring changes. Once a step is completed, there will be never be a need to change the deliverable : whether the deliverable is the business requirements, the project plan, or the project goals. At some unconscious level, by ignoring the change management process, it is hoped that there will be no changes. This leads to conflict when the change requests appear during the project, as they inevitably do. The root cause can be treated if change management processes are drawn up at this stage.

2. **The people** : Usually, based on the organisation structure, and the project team is derived. While the functional expertise of the person is considered, as much attention is usually not focused on the attitudes of the people. An implementation of a package across the enterprise will require changes in the way people work. Even when the implementation is for a new company, each person brings with him/her the experience - for example, of the workflows - of the previous organisation he/she was in.

For example, as the insurance industry liberalises in India, the new joint ventures will implement insurance packages. Many of the people involved in the project will have prior experience with the nationalised insurance companies, which will influence their outlook. The line between experience and baggage is thin : it depends on the level of adaptability and flexibility of the individual. It is important to make sure that the people on the project are both experienced and change-positive. Just as organisations train project members in business practices, if needed, organisations should consider training key project members for attitudinal skills.

3. **The goal** : Often, the goal of the project is obvious, so it is left unstated. The danger of implicit goals is that there is scope for misunderstanding. With Murphy's laws working overtime, if the scope can be misunderstood, it will. Also, as the project continues, change management needs to keep the goal in mind to decide on the acceptability of changes requested.

To use an analogy, national constitutions have a set of first principles, goals or guidelines, established usually in the preamble or the first chapter. However comprehensive a constitution may be, there is always a need to interpret it, to change it. Whenever this arises, the judiciary or the legislature look at that first chapter which defines the goals. For every project, the need for such clear goals cannot be over-emphasized. It would seem from experience that the absence of formalised goals is a recipe for disaster.

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