

User-Driven Application Implementation

By Matt O'Connor

User acceptance can make or break an enterprise application implementation.

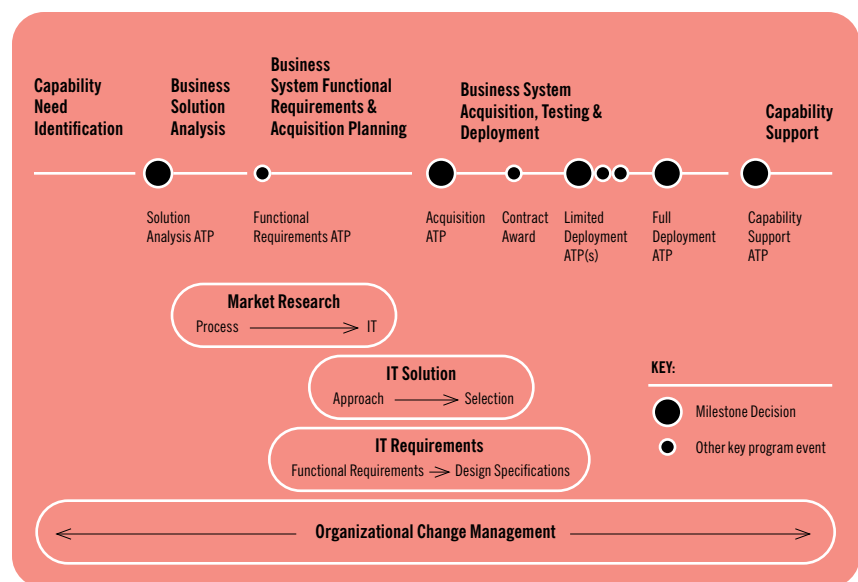
Businesses today are adopting a staggering amount of enterprise applications across their organizations. Adopting these applications is expensive and time-consuming but fundamental to operational competitiveness and transformational improvements. The key to successful enterprise application implementations is user orientation: Focus on people and how they will use the technology.

Critical components exist in any implementation: funding approval, vendor selection, go-live, and as our more technical colleagues often remind us, system architecture. But the biggest difference between a successful enterprise application implementation and a failure is user acceptance.

Key takeaways:

1. Solicit user input early and often. Establish a cross-functional business decision team with a responsibility matrix and defined time commitments.
2. Make user satisfaction your primary measure of success, not the go-live date or cost.
3. Select a technology team to partner with in order to configure the system to your organization's specifications.

Business Capability Acquisition Cycle (technology implementation process)



The standard practice for technology implementation falls short. Organizational change management is not taken seriously enough. Typically, the responsibility of identifying the capability need, business solution, and development of a future-state system falls on the shoulders of one key individual, not the organization. With minimal support, the individual shepherds the project as best they can to the point where a system is selected, developed, and ready for use by the

broader organization. At this point, the organization, for better or worse, has a system it must make do with for the foreseeable future. With minimal buy-in from the broader organization, the challenge of adoption becomes an uphill battle, with the organization choosing to work, for the most part, as it has always worked and only accepting the new system when and where it must.

Application architecture is complex and not to be taken for granted. Yet

Implementation Step	Change Management Standard Practice	Change Management Best Practice
CAPABILITY NEED IDENTIFICATION	User dissatisfaction with current capabilities bubbles up, prompting executives to appoint a champion to assess the situation.	Capability needs are identified during recurring (quarterly/annual) technology capability assessments. Executives appoint a cross-functional application decision team to assess capability enhancements with support from the broader organization.
BUSINESS SOLUTION ANALYSIS	Project champion conducts light review of current issue and looks for potential solution.	Application decision team conducts extensive solution analysis. The team maps current and future processes and conducts exhaustive market research into potential solution partners (creating organizational buy-in for future solution).
BUSINESS SYSTEM FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS & ACQUISITION PLANNING	Project champion conducts light review of technology partners and starts selection process, seldom developing functional requirements.	Application decision team with organizational support develops functional requirements and conducts detailed acquisition planning, which includes developing capability goals, budget, and, most importantly, a timeline and approach to full user adoption. Acquisition planning involves several rounds of partner-fit assessments.
BUSINESS SYSTEM ACQUISITION, TESTING, & DEPLOYMENT	Project champion manages implementation with light support.	Application decision team conducts detailed acquisition process seeking a partner who is a true best fit. (Cost is a single criterion, not the determining factor.) Extensive testing and configuration are conducted by soliciting input from the broader organization. Deployment is phased to meet user needs and adoption goals, with the main objective of improving organizational capabilities.
CAPABILITY SUPPORT	Support champion monitors current capability for performance issues. Technology moves to maintenance mode until capability gap becomes obstructive.	Application decision team actively manages capability support through recurring (quarterly/annual) capability assessments. Systems are upgraded regularly or replaced promptly as business needs evolve.

most applications that companies are adopting today have sufficient architecture. With thorough market research, companies can vet technology partners to ensure that their application architecture is acceptable. What matters most from a technology partner is its willingness to be a true partner, to customize in the short term, and commit to meeting its clients' evolving needs over the next five to 10 years.

Time and money are also important considerations. The price for any technology implementation is often a significant portion of the overall company budget, and a system that never gets built is worthless. Today, however, most of the technology that companies seek to implement is feasible. Most implementation delays are caused by difficult business decisions during implementation. The system can be built however you want (within reason) provided the business can make trade-offs—such as how frequently to restock inventory, what SKUs to put into inventory, who enters

critical data, and how to ensure data integrity. These decisions are best made by a team that is fully engaged in the system implementation. Trying to bring subject matter experts up to speed for ad hoc decisions often causes more confusion and delay than having them closely involved in the implementation process.

Most companies fail in user adoption. They build applications that are not used or are underutilized. Change management is critical to change the organization. Simply buying new applications will not suffice. A growth mindset is required, and companies must anticipate organizational change when buying a new system. New applications mandate that organizations rethink how people perform certain processes and whether they require significant training. Substantial improvement is difficult without changing people's roles and responsibilities. You want to implement an application that improves how people and processes function. To achieve this requires heavy user involvement from

start to finish, with an expectation that their day jobs will be different at the end of the implementation from what they were at the start.

The journey to digital is only a series of technology implementations. Organizations must adopt new technology and embrace new ways of working. As enterprise applications become more ubiquitous, their adoption becomes fundamental to business success. Unfortunately, implementations lack user involvement by default. This needs to change; heavy user involvement throughout implementation is required. People need to expect system implementations to change how they work day to day. A good start is to establish a cross-functional application decision team involving a broad range of business stakeholders and to conduct a technology capability assessment. ■

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