



Does your Technology Meet your Global Business Needs?

Setting up a Project...Properly

This series of articles focuses on the global demands of businesses today and what steps can and should be taken to realize the greatest benefit and capitalize on the global opportunities.

The Starting Point

Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) is such a broad notion, covering so many aspects of product development and commercialization, that some find it hard to envelope the concept into a manageable entity. PLM is workflow automation and nothing more. It requires a strategy, informed resources, data, applications and process knowledge to be successful.

With PLM there are so many misconceptions and missed opportunities. Whether you are a smaller company or a large one, PLM initiatives all require similar steps and decisions; the difference is the length and depth of the project. Properly outlining a project is a huge step toward success.

Here we will walk through the preliminary planning needed as well as the steps to take once the project commences to ensure a more smoothly run and effective project that achieves its intended outcome.

Planning

Planning a project is the first step to engaging the appropriate people at the right time to execute the project properly and timely. Outline the project by studying the company culture, reviewing the business drivers, aligning resources and gathering support for the initiative. Most importantly, formalize the project so everyone knows it is happening. It lends credibility to the effort and encourages participation.

Planning also includes building a business case and identifying a budget. The business case should clearly outline the reasons you are choosing to undertake a project. The more money you intend to ask for, the more solid the business case must be. Be creative in looking at all aspects of the business for savings, possible improvements, and tangible and intangible benefits to users. Use real numbers to support claims, not future projections or opinions. Research as much as possible about competitors and your industry in general to glean information to make your points.

Be realistic about the Return on Investment (ROI) you intend to achieve. If you cannot make the numbers work with earmarked budget, consider alternatives such as a longer phased approach, a different type of solution, an interim solution, or a focused effort on process improvement until such time that technology is affordable.

Continue planning by building the team. Decide the optimal number of resources and how they should participate. Depending on the size of the company, identify a steering committee to govern the project. Business stakeholders and project sponsors should be identified as well and presented to throughout the project to keep them abreast of progress or issues that arise. Create a project team to drive the daily project tasks and determine their level of involvement. If resources are dedicated to the project, backfill resources might be necessary. Don't underestimate the amount of effort it takes to deploy a major



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technology. Expecting resources to do their regular job as well as dedicate 20+ hours to the project is a recipe for disaster.

Creation of a timeline is also a critical step in planning a project. Understand how long it will take to: complete the business case; present to management; obtain signoff; review vendors; negotiate contracts; etc. The timeline also helps avoid the project falling behind or conflicting with calendars and other projects.

To begin, analyze your business with an objective eye, and look at all processes, not just the problematic ones. Look at resources that you have available to you to analyze your business. Use both management and end users to glean a wider and balanced perspective of the issues. If you are considering adding technology at some point, analyze before you go to vendors so you don't waste their time or your. If it isn't possible to analyze effectively or use your resources then get outside help. Objective advice is priceless when it is based on hindsight and actual experience and can actually save you money in the long run by guiding through costly missteps.

It is important to remember you are looking to analyze your business in order to make it better and turn out better products. It is not about turning the business into something different. There are core processes that will always be part of designing and producing project that should remain constant. The non-value-add or redundant processes are the ones that should be targeted for change. Be realistic about which ones are in fact not valuable to the end product.

This analysis must also include the most important element- the data. At its core, PLM is automating the flow of tasks and information. Data is pushed around the world to various partners as the recipe for making a product. That same data will act as a contract between you and your trading partners on exactly what is expected. If data is missing or incorrect, late or of poor quality, then it doesn't help you create a better product or run a more profitable business.

As the analysis is taking place, document everything. You will need to have the process documented for your chosen vendor and internally to see the flow. Comparison and presentation are much easier with a visual understanding of the improvement opportunities.

You must also have the data needs documented as well. Understand where your data is lacking or where skills might be deficient in producing acceptable data. Consider how your partners, licensees, and overseas offices view the data on their end and what can be done to enhance information sharing.

Lastly, present the findings to management. Before doing so, understand how they will react to certain concepts, language, suggestions and advice. It is important to talk in certainties, not opinions. If you are "selling" a concept or change, there must be value associated that can be proven. Also present as many statistics as possible, preferably from a respected source. Statistics from your mother don't count!



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The Project

Once preliminary planning is completed, the outline is in place, the business case approved, the budget earmarked and the timeline agreed upon, the official project can commence. A formal kick-off is always a good way to build rapport and discuss expectations of the project team and project sponsors and leadership. Review the accomplishments to date to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Project Management

Project management is one element that runs through the entire project. A Project Manager (PM) should be assigned to run all aspects of the project internally. For larger companies there may be others contributing to the management of the project such a PMO (project management office), but the PM is still the “main man”...or woman as it might be!

The first responsibility of the PM is outlining the responsibilities of the project team members, sponsors, stakeholders, steering committee, and later the vendor resources when they are engaged. Following on assigning roles, the project plan is written and maintained throughout. Only one project plan should exist for any project. Trying to manage off multiple plans is a recipe for disaster.

Other tasks of the PM are to:

- Set up and monitor the metrics by which the project outcome will be judged
- Manage expectations of the business, IT, and the vendor
- Manage the budget
- Manage external resources such as consultants, systems integrators, etc.
- Determine project cadence
- Determine the methodology for configuration
- Determine the deployment methodology
- Manage change consistently

Change Management

Another element that runs through the entire project is change management. Many companies try to eliminate these critical tasks to save money, potentially leading the business into uncertain territory without the right tools. Addressing how daily tasks and data collection will change for users is important for minimizing confusion. Keep the flow of information to end users consistent so they are aware of project successes as well as issues that require resolution. If your company doesn't have experience or a dedicated resource for Organizational Change Management (OCM), consider engaging one for the duration of the project.

Process Improvement

If you are considering implementing exactly what you do today, budget would be better served elsewhere. PLM is the one huge opportunity to diagnose the health of your business, review weaknesses in skill sets, upgrade processes and determine the inconsistencies in information.



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Use the implementation of the application as a primary driver of business and calendar re-engineering. Redundancies, manual processes, ineffectual communication methods, and extra meetings all contribute to a lengthy and costly product lifecycle. Workflow applications like PLM are only as supportive as the information entered. You've already documented the "as-is" processes; now you need to obtain agreement on the "to be" processes. What do you want your target lifecycle to look like?

Data and Content

As mentioned earlier, data is the single most important element of a PLM initiative. How you collect it, what it represents, how its integrity is maintained, how easy it is to enter, how easy it is to extract, and how it is shared are questions every project team should ask and answer while considering an application.

You have many options available for gathering and managing content. The discussion of internal versus external data begins with the determination of the best value-add to the company. Is there data in your organization that change frequently that would be more cost effective to outsource to a content provider? We are all familiar with content providers such as Pantone, but what about other information whose inaccuracy can be much more costly to a business such as trade rulings, customs classifications, or international sanctioned parties screening. You need to consider the cost benefit of employing a person or group to manage some of this type of data vs. contracting a trusted content provider who functions in these realms every day.

Also review information that can be templated for easy use because it is fairly consistent. Construction details, grade tables, operations, care and content and tagging and labeling are some examples of where consistency can be used to the users advantage.

The following are the critical data elements that should be considered when selecting and implementing a PLM application.

- Image Management
- Design Elements / Components
- Specifications
- Sample Management
- Raw Materials Management
- RFQ and Costing
- Sourcing & Trade Management
- Vendor management
- Quality Assurance and Quality Control

RFP and System Selection

The elements of a good RFP (Request for Proposal) are hotly debated. Some think a long, involved RFP is better to see if the vendor pays attention to the details. Some think short and to-the-point is better to leave opportunities for suggestions from the vendor. The ideal RFP should fall somewhere in between. Make it long enough to get your points across and introduce the prospective vendors to your organization, but short enough that the vendors can properly respond to it in a realistic amount of time.

This is your first opportunity to vet the vendors as well. Be concerned if the vendor: doesn't ask questions; asks too many questions; doesn't respond by the deadline; doesn't respond fully to the RFP; makes



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excuses for information not being correct, etc. If the vendor wants your business, they should understand the importance of setting the best example up front.

A meaningful selection process included the following:

- Make the RFP informative and of proper length
- Use the right language to get your point across without verbosity
- Create a realistic timeline for your selection process
- Communicate!!!
- Don't waste your time or the vendors by not being prepared or having the proper team in place to vet the applications
- Make the demonstrations meaningful by looking at your data as well as some that the vendor presents to get gauge how the functionality handles various information types
- Be flexible to ensure everyone gets what they need out of the selection process
- Evaluate fairly and objectively, keeping in mind your organization and its needs
- Make timely decisions regarding the application because no one likes to be strung along

User Testing and Training

Two areas companies should never shortchange on is testing and training. If the budget is smaller than needed for the effort or the scope creep eats into the budget more quickly than anticipated, formal training is often eliminated in favor of a more self imposed training method. Train-the-trainer is a great approach long term, but allowing folks to fumble around and “try” to figure out functionality is absurd.

Training is critical to help users make the transition to new automation and keeps them from getting frustrated. When identifying the training methods give serious consideration to your audience, company culture, depth of change and the intuitiveness of the chosen software.

Common training methods include:

- Web-based vs. Classroom
- Self paced vs. specified topics
- Offsite vs. onsite

Training execution decisions:

- Train as you go vs. all-inclusive
- Do you train everyone at one time or slot training in as new functionality or tasks come into play

Best practices in testing require that the project team be involved in formal testing procedures using a test script of use cases. User Acceptance Testing (UAT) should have a formal outline of the functionality being tested and by whom. The testing should focus on content as well as application performance.

Deployment

Deployment is all about user support. During the deployment, transition quickly to new functionality, but allow adequate ramp up time for users to feel comfortable with the new tools and processes. It is beneficial to understand the pros and cons of each deployment option to select the one that best fits your organization.



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Typical deployment decisions:

- Pilot vs. Limited Production
- Rollout manageable functionality
- Gauge achievable milestones
- Manage Change

Post Mortem

Finally, in order to determine the actual success of the project, you must conduct a post mortem going through your original metrics and measuring the outcome against them. If you are deploying in a phased approach, metrics should be set for each phase. If there were issues throughout the project, be objective as to where the problems stem from and fix them before the next phase is complete.

Too many companies don't perform post mortems on projects to really get a sense of the level of the success they achieved. Perhaps they are not interested or required to quantify their success. Many companies fail to include metrics in their project planning to gauge the benefits and success at the project completion.

Remember, no project will be completely perfect and success comes in varying degrees. PLM is not an easy application to implement. If it were, everyone would be successful.

Final Thoughts

Below are some final thoughts that we find are important to reiterate to our customers throughout projects. These thoughts tend to keep things in perspective regarding change to the organization.

- Phased projects are always more successful
- PLM should be evolutionary not revolutionary
- Implementation is costly if you are not prepared
- Data integrity is key
- Objectivity is critical



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