

Project Management Tales – If It's Going Well, It's Not Too Late To Screw It Up



Debbie Gallagher

By Debbie Gallagher

Each story in this series of Project Management Tales is true, but company names have been changed. Some stories occurred in Canada and others took place in the US and overseas.

Background

Acme Corporation had already successfully implemented a new general ledger, accounts receivable, accounts payable, and financial reporting system. It had taken six months, and users were pleased with the results.

The next module to be implemented was Logistics. It would take six months. In order to streamline and to take advantage of the new system's features, the business processes were to be reviewed and modified as part of the implementation.

The core team included the Logistics Manager and two Supervisors. The project manager's assessment was that the team members were very good choices. The manager, who was to act as advisor with a significant time commitment, was experienced and knew the organization and its needs well. Both supervisors were power users, with good problem solving skills, as well as in-depth knowledge of the current system and department practices. They were to be the hands-on active participants on the team.

The Situation

The first three months of the implementation of Logistics went very well, with no unusual problems.

Then, Acme started planning the takeover of a competitor. The project sponsor needed the Logistics manager to assist in evaluation of the target company's operations, so she removed the Logistics Manager from the implementation team.

Action Taken

The project manager identified the removal of the sponsor and manager as risks to the project and made efforts to mitigate the risks. He urged the sponsor to provide a new advisor and new sponsor to the project. When that was denied, he asked for the project to be delayed or paused during the takeover.

However, the sponsor had been impressed with the implementation of the previous modules and progress

to date on the Logistics module. The team seemed to be doing very well, and replacing the manager was not a priority. The sponsor also felt that the essential team members were the two supervisors, as they were the doers on the team.

The takeover would require many company resources, and the sponsor couldn't see the point in keeping unnecessary resources on a project that was doing just fine.

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The manager and the project sponsor were unavailable to the team for the remaining three months of the project, in order to work on the takeover planning, and the resulting acquisition.

Epilogue

The implementation team managed to finish the project on time and on budget, without the manager, and without any further input from the project sponsor. When the new system went live, the users in Logistics were very pleased with the results. The new business processes were easily put into practice, and the new system provided much needed functionality for the department.

The project manager heard from the project sponsor after go-live on the new Logistics system. The sponsor was very upset, as she had been receiving calls from irate plant managers. Several of the reports used in the plants no longer provided the level of detail they used to.

Investigation determined that the design and configuration of the Logistics module had eliminated the detail that the plant managers had relied on in their reports. Several of the reports were essential to plant operations. Review of the business processes, then re-work of some business processes and system design decisions began immediately and took two and a half months to complete.

Some of the new business processes were very similar to the original processes, due to the awkwardness of retrofitting to an already-configured system. As a result, the anticipated benefit from re-designed business processes was not fully realized.

Conclusion

The loss of the Logistics Manager had been significant, as this advisor had been knowledgeable about the needs of the organization outside of the Logistics department. Without her, the plant managers' reporting requirements had been neglected.

In addition, the lack of project sponsorship during the same time meant that there was no high level review of the decisions being made by the team. Management commitment is critical to a successful project. The sponsor's first mistaken assumption was that the project would continue to succeed without her commitment and without her supporting the manager's time spent on the project. The sponsor's second incorrect assumption was that the doers were the only important team members, and that the team could do without the advisor and the involvement of the sponsor. Unfortunately, the sponsor made a third mistake. She assumed that since the project was already going well, that it would continue to do well with changed resources. These were dangerous assumptions. T G

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