The 10 Pitfalls to Avoid In Implementing Quality Management System Software

10 Pitfalls in Implementing Quality Management System Software & How to Avoid Them

As the global economy continues to grow, so do customer expectations for higher quality products and services at a lower cost. In order to satisfy increasing customer demands, and consequently the resulting rapid internal change required to keep up while protecting the bottom line, management system excellence is a must. Quality management system software is a key tool in achieving organizational excellence. However, like any tool, the results of use are only as good as the product’s design in combination with its corresponding implementation.

The following list represents common pitfalls based on our real-world experiences that could impact the results of quality management system software rollout, along with tips on how to avoid these pitfalls.

#1 Pitfall: Building without the proper blueprint - Organizations rollout new software with a “plug and play” expectation. Only a portion of the resource needs are considered for initial planning, launch, infant care and long-term maintenance. Many projects fail due to insufficient resource planning necessary to do the job right.

Avoiding this Pitfall: First and foremost, you need a strategic plan for bringing this new software tool on-board. Start with documenting clear targets for cost, quality, delivery and service - just like any other process. Once the targets have been documented, discuss the reality of these objectives with others that have experience with the product at hand (the software supplier, other colleagues within your industry, internal IT personnel, etc.) and make adjustments accordingly. Be conservative with your timeline. Do not start out your project by over-promising and under-delivering. Achievement starts with proper planning. Proper planning prevents poor performance (“The 5Ps”).

#2 Pitfall: Lack of making a business case - Trying to motivate and modify the behavior of your colleagues using “Because ISO 9001 says so…” or “Because the corporate policy states…” isn’t going to work in the long-run. Many times, lack of support and progress on a project is due to the assignee’s disconnection to the short and long-term benefits.

Avoiding this Pitfall: SELL the project to future users. You must get the attention and support of future users by selling how the product will make their lives better, or by making day-to-day tasks more efficient. Gather a short list of wastes or difficulties associated with the current method of operation, followed by a demonstration of how this product will improve these difficulties.

#3 Pitfall: Disconnecting with business objectives - Coming up with a slogan, motto or other “cheer” may sound great, but how does this high-level goal relate to the applicable members of your team? Establishing goals without converting these goals into clear objectives - at relevant levels and functions - may lead to groupthink.

Avoiding this Pitfall: Once objectives and targets have been established, connect these measures to your rollout team members’ work plans. Create “employee contracts” while ensuring that an adequate portion of each team member’s participation is committed to your project. Often times, project managers have no authority over their team members. In order to retain a bit of control and
predictability, ensure there is a written agreement supporting the project with a record of management approval.

**#4 Pitfall: Shoving your business into the software box** - Each organization has its own culture and rhythm in its day-to-day operations. A one-size-fits-all solution is very rarely an effective one. In order to optimize profitability, software must be made to fit the demands of general customer needs. Trying to abruptly change the language or other basic habits of your organization to align with a foreign product is a quick way to lose buy-in from users and top management.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** The best way to ensure that all parties are on the same page is to have a clear, documented agreement with your software provider. Ensure the following details are addressed in your contract.

i. Identify who will take care of you by ensuring a dedicated supplier representative(s) is identified for the project.

ii. Use your supplier representative to validate the objectives you’ve created to avoid Pitfall #1.

iii. Document your training needs and what is needed from your supplier for prototype, pre-launch & production phases. The best time to negotiate service agreements and potential contingencies, should they be needed, is during the contract phase.

**#5 Pitfall: The army of ONE (rollout in a vacuum vs. cross-functional team rollout)** - Trying to implement change without consideration and perspective from multiple disciplines will often result in negative impacts that were not initially detected. While process change may benefit one area of your organization, it may hurt or hinder another.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** Clearly define ownership of the product during prototype (if applicable), pre-launch & production phases. In most cases, the team that is rolling out new software will not maintain ownership in the long run. Brainstorm with your team using a tool like Fault Tree Analysis (FTA), Cause & Effect (C&E) Matrix or an Ishikawa (Fishbone) Diagram to discuss potential risks associated with software implementation during all phases of use; including an exit plan should the software fail to meet your long-term needs.

**#6 Pitfall: Insufficient testing throughout the realization phase** - The software is rolled out too quickly without validating that the product works as it was intended. System interactions are not completely tested to ensure data integrity remains after manipulation, such as, importing, exporting or communication with other products.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** Define pilot lines/departments that can be used for learning, debugging and other customizations. Create scenarios based on real-world experiences and use the product in a test environment under various conditions. Process various scenarios using your current information system and compare the results to your new software solution.

Conduct a measurement system analysis (MSA) to identify any variation from one data entry instance to the next (repeatability) or variation from one user to another (reproducibility).
Finally, spend time analyzing the user experience (customer perception) in order to evaluate simple modifications or areas where more in-depth training will be necessary. Provide a clear process for user feedback in order to quickly detect and discuss any concerns before they grow.

**#7 Pitfall: No internal sales & marketing of the product** - A solution has been created, but very few members of the organization know of its existence. Communication has been limited on the solution’s capability and how it can benefit the organization, department or individuals.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** Make sure to communicate before, during and after implementation by creating a communication plan for your implementation team. It is critical that top management be kept in the loop on the progress of the project. Ask management to allow time on recurring meeting agendas for project updates – good or bad. Early identification of additional resource needs, small successes and overall project status will give the leadership level of the organization a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Internal postings on communication boards, all-employee meeting presentations, articles in the company newsletters or discussions with smaller targeted teams (focus groups) may also be options to ensure buy-in.

**#8 Pitfall: Improper change management** - There is no formal process for making updates to user access or document ownership as employees move within the organization. Records such as customer complaints, return material authorizations (RMAs), corrective or preventive actions (CAPAs), etc. may lie dormant due to an incorrect electronic assignment. Without an effective interaction between the software administration process and the human resource management process, document assignments are inevitably going to become inaccurate.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** Connect employee movement to the software administration process. While human resources (HR) may be a bit reluctant to provide too many details about personnel shifts, a process for quick change to roles and records assignment can be done with limited sensitive information exchanged. By adding a member of the HR or Finance groups to your project, a simple process can be created to ensure assignment accuracy of documents.

**#9 Pitfall: No solicitation of customer feedback** – The communication regarding a new or changing tool is a one-way street, giving little or no consideration to the internal or external customer.

**Avoiding this Pitfall:** Create a forum(s) for regular feedback from your internal customer (the end user). Users should be given an opportunity to give honest feedback on their perception of the new tool. Besides, your users will rely on this new solution as a part of their delay work activities. Feedback should also be solicited from internal administrators or advanced users to ensure that the back-end is running efficiently, reports are easy to create and problems are resolved in a reasonable manner.
#10 Pitfall: Lack of a long-term control plan for sustainability and continual improvement - A software solution has been adopted, but there is inadequate planning or resource allocation for maintaining the tool. Without a caretaker and plan to improve the functionality over time, users inherently seek out shortcuts or other solutions.

Avoiding this Pitfall: Initial project plan should consider recurring development, refresher training and improvement forums. Like any asset, there is a cost associated with maintenance and improvement. Most software products include occasional upgrades, bug fixes and other enhancements. By documenting long-term maintenance activities and responsibility, the product is more likely to be utilized to its full potential.

Conclusion
In conclusion, an organization’s chance of achieving or surpassing their objectives is higher with a proper plan for software rollout. Beware of the pitfalls. These pitfalls are not new. Embracing lessons-learned from experienced team members or other organizations is critical to minimizing failures. Be honest about your resource needs, particularly team member availability. Regular monitoring of your objectives versus actual performance will ensure you get the most out of your investment.

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