

Building the best ERP project team



ERP implementation is a significant project for your company that involves a team of participants from throughout your organization. The team must have an executive sponsor, a strong leader, clear objectives, and sufficient budget and resources to successfully complete the job.

The implementation team should be organized and managed like any other project team. Most importantly, however, the majority of the team members must come from the user community – not IT, not professional implementers or “hired guns,” not the people you can most afford to dedicate to a project outside of their normal duties. The system belongs to the users and they are the beneficiaries of the improvements the system will deliver, so they have the most to gain and will be highly motivated to bring the project to a successful conclusion on time.

Your ERP implementation project team should include:

Executive Sponsor

The executive sponsor provides the vision and the commitment to keep the project moving forward in the presence of other demands or priorities. This is not a full-time position. The sponsor needs to be involved just enough to inspire the team, make sure resources are made available when needed, and to resolve any conflicts that cannot be resolved at lower levels.

Project Leader

While previous project management experience is desirable, the primary characteristic of your team leader is leadership ability. This person should know and understand your business, have management skills, and be a good communicator. He or she keeps the team organized and on track. The team leader chairs the weekly status meetings with the task leaders and coordinates between the various sectors of the business and tasks. The leader is the focal point for the project and represents the team and the project to upper management.

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The Plan

Project management is a well-understood process with many resources – books, classes, software tools – to support it. It is very important to use these tools to establish a detailed plan, budget and schedule to direct the management of the project through to completion. The plan should be reviewed and updated at least weekly. Any deviations or concerns must be addressed and resolved quickly so that they do not have an undue impact on other tasks or the eventual success of the project.

Team Members

The overall project can be broken down into clearly identified tasks and responsibilities that can be arranged on a time line (Gant or PERT chart) with names assigned to each task – your team members. Again, it is important to assign team members to tasks that relate to their area of responsibility, both because they are the ones who know the most about how that area functions and they are the ones who will be affected by that part of the system when it goes live. They have good personal reasons to want the system to be a success.

Communications

Keep good records and communicate your progress throughout the life of the project. All areas of the business will be affected by the new system and you don't want to surprise them with a fait accompli. Get their cooperation and interest by keeping them informed and involved.

System implementation is always a team effort. Get as many people involved in the project as early as possible – prior to and during system selection – so they feel like they have a stake in the system, a sense of “ownership.” And that includes more than the direct team members. Those not directly involved should also be able to follow along as the project proceeds, so there is less fear of change or fear of the unknown to dull their anticipation of the availability of these new business management tools.



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