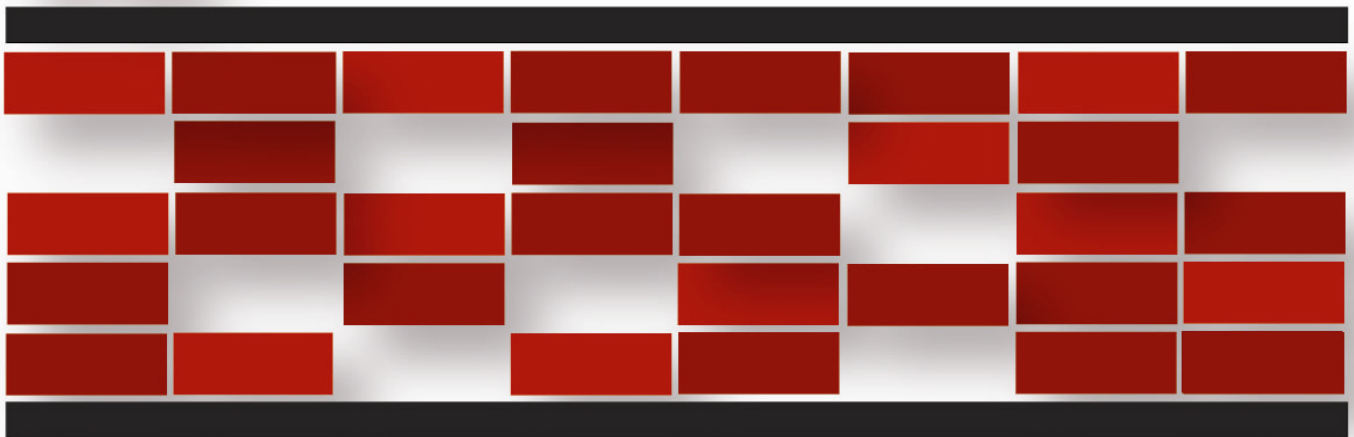


Article

Optimizing Your Technology Deployment by Managing Business Processes

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Technology solutions can drive improved business performance and enhance customer service, but many deployments fail to meet expectations. There are many reasons why technology rollouts fail, from lack of planning to lack of funding, but our work with numerous clients underscores a less-understood culprit: poorly defined business processes. While many companies expect to reap benefits by the automation capabilities of technology, without careful evaluation, they can end up automating bad business processes. Following are the steps that help companies deploy a solution that achieves true business benefits while building a foundation for future success.

1. Document Existing Processes

To achieve the benefits of automation that technology can deliver, companies must fully understand the processes they are trying to automate. Some organizations we work with have no process documentation. Others have binders full of information, but it is out-of-date or incomplete. It's rare to find a company that has a well-documented, current record of their core business processes. It requires effort to detail the steps involved in conducting business day-to-day, but a well-documented set of business processes does more than ease the technology deployment, it provides insight into the entire business workflow across various in-house departments. In short, documenting your processes is a solid step toward better business insight.

2. Evaluate Each and Every Process

Once you know exactly what each member of the team does, you can start to ask "Why?" Who is responsible for each step? Where does the information flow and why? And, most importantly, does the process support business objectives? If the answer is, "we've always done it this way," then it may be time to reevaluate. When too many bad, superfluous, or repetitive processes become ingrained in daily operations, a business stagnates.

Companies often get hung up in this phase of a technology deployment. They focus on forcing the technology to automate existing processes – which often requires costly modifications – rather than questioning the validity of the process itself.

3. Institute a Formal Change Review and Approval Process

While many bad processes can be weeded out, good processes deserve to be kept intact. But when the technology solution doesn't offer an out-of-the box method for managing and automating them, custom modifications may be in order, depending on the criticality of the particular process to your core business objectives. The only way to effectively manage this is to institute a formal change review/approval process that includes prioritization of requested changes and designation of an individual with final-sign off authority for change requests. Failure to institute and manage such a process can all too often result in the dreaded "Scope Creep" where project costs can quickly escalate out of control and deployment dates are significantly delayed.

Key to an effective change review process is creating a team that can establish a system of checks and balances to measure *needs* against *wants*, and identify which changes will deliver business benefit rather than just accommodate users who may be reluctant to change routines. It's very easy for a persuasive person to request "just this one little thing," but these "little changes" add up to a long list of custom programming. And, each "little change" has the potential to impact some other mission-critical aspect of the deployment.

4. Consider a "Phased" Deployment

Once processes are identified, documented, and vetted and change requests have been prioritized, it's time to determine which changes to the technology platform are mission critical and which can be managed in later stages. Too often, companies delay going live until every single change is addressed. Prioritizing and phasing in system functionality allows a company to maximize ROI by making immediate improvements in their operations. They can address critical needs right away and enable users to become familiar with the system, easing the adoption of future changes. Phases can be separated by as little as two to four weeks, creating a continuous stream of process improvement with minimal disruption to the organization.

While these four steps can improve a company's chance for success with its technology deployment, it's important to note that selecting the right vendor partner also plays a key role. A technology vendor can help a company determine which business processes can add value, and which deserve a second look. If the vendor acquiesces on every change without feedback, your deployment will face troubles down the road.

But with the right vendor partnership, and the willingness to take a good look at defining, refining, and automating your business processes, your technology deployment has an excellent chance of success.

About the Author

David A. Miller is Director of Field Service Systems for Vertical Solutions, Inc. (VSI), a leading developer of Service Management software that enables upsell and cross-sell capabilities. Mr. Miller has been with the company since 1996. Prior to joining VSI, he worked for more than 20 years in the field service industry, holding a progression of technical and management positions in field and headquarters' settings. In his current role, he has responsibility for driving the direction of VSI's Field Service and Mobile applications. He also manages staff implementations of VSI's flagship product, PowerHelp. For more information, contact him at dave.miller@vertsol.com or visit VSI's web site at www.VSI-PowerHelp.com.