



Are You Prepared for Day Two?

By Mal Poulin

What happens after the "go-live" date?

Organizations spend large amounts of time, resources, and energy to reach an established "go live" date after a significant business or technology change. These changes may come in the form of business process improvements, system installations and upgrades, product innovations, or acquisitions. Often though momentum leading up to the implementation date wanes once the date passes and attention shifts to the next big event on a corporate strategy checklist. Ongoing demands in day-to-day business challenge organizations to maintain this momentum and the infrastructure necessary to support these newly-implemented changes. With strong sustainment strategies that optimize investments, organizations can realize their return on that investment and business value. Success on Day Two—and all the days that follow—is enhanced by implementing sustainment strategies focusing on business, processes, people and technology.

Evaluate the current state of the initiative

The first step in enacting a successful sustainment strategy is evaluating performance in relation to the business, processes, people and technology. Here are some questions to consider:

- Does the organization optimize and maintain business processes?
- Are employees provided with opportunities to continually learn and increase proficiency?
- Is the organization utilizing the technology to its fullest potential?

This evaluation can be done by using self-evaluation techniques and tools or by partnering with a consulting company experienced in evaluating organizations. Diversifying the methods used to analyze an organization's performance is one key to successfully discovering the needs, gaps and successes. Some diversification methods include personally addressing and interviewing business stakeholders, surveying team members throughout the organization to validate the adoption of the initiative and integrating objective data regarding employee performance, proficiency and compliance.

Once the information from these sources has been gathered, organizations can design a plan to make improvements that will continue to demonstrate return on investment for every implementation and business initiative. For example, a large consumer packaged goods company is implementing a global ERP system over the three years. As part of its sustainment strategy, the company will evaluate how to help the organization continue to improve human performance with the ERP system and further integrate it into business processes. By discovering and analyzing where the organization needs to focus attention on learning and performance support, leadership will be able to immediately develop and deploy content supporting employee performance and continue to realize value from the investment. By integrating the analysis of employee performance with information derived from production reports and business intelligence, the business owners can constantly take the pulse of their business units and ensure the success and value of their ERP rollouts.

Empower the business

A successful sustainment strategy starts with a clear vision of business success, which is why it is imperative to design and implement specific leadership and management interventions for the organization. These solutions are based on business and performance metrics that are critical to your business model that was envisioned at the start. Creating a shared clarity in purpose, consistency in methods, and predictability in results requires governance and rigor. Factors that lend themselves to the development of that governance and management are a deep expertise in human, group and organizational dynamics.

Evidence of success in implementing this strategy is represented in fast and effective implementation of projects/initiatives/strategies, alignment on issues to avoid delays and increased costs, concise definitions and expectations within the business and teams, clarity around business priorities, and relevant metrics established to evaluate business impact.

Executive management and stakeholders must establish a clear vision in order to achieve the results listed

above. Once “go live” has passed, it is more important than ever that those managing the business are empowered to do so with the most information possible. Helping managers manage their business using the power of the new systems, processes, or organization is a necessary component of a successful strategy.

Optimize the processes

When all employees understand the processes they perform in order to meet their business goals after an implementation, they are more likely to take ownership of the work. Therefore, not only must business stakeholders identify and communicate these processes to their employees, they must also assign and publicize ownership. Employees who possess a sense of ownership of specific processes increase responsibility and accountability throughout the workforce.

In a manufacturing environment, specifically on the assembly line, process optimization and compliance are the keys to a profitable business. This is just as true in all aspects of the business. As the saying goes, “*time is money.*” In order for the processes a company employs to be analyzed and optimized, it is important that there is clear ownership and accountability. The success of the strategy rests with those process owners. They are the stakeholders and subject matter experts who make a difference.

As with the analysis of employee performance, understanding the efficiency of the processes that run the business is essential to making the bold moves necessary to optimize overall business performance. Methodical and consistent activities can greatly reduce the time and effort to analyze business process efficiency. Just as the economy changes externally, so does the internal economy of a business. The criteria used to analyze and optimize business processes changes. Therefore, a strategy that supports constant, real-time analysis will be a winner.

Changes are a natural part of business and should be expected instead of a surprise. As the organization progresses and changes, processes will need improvement and modification to adjust to new technologies and investments. A crucial way to continuously improve business processes is establishing communities of practice. Depending on the nature of the employees’ daily activities, they are learning skills pertaining to processes or technologies at different rates and different times. Communities of practice provide an arena in which employees can collaborate and share their experience and what they have learned, which enables a powerful but informal learning environment. As processes are updated through ongoing evaluation, the organization’s leaders have the potential to create changes to enhance business value and increase efficiency. As a result employee and business performance overall will improve. One way in which organizations seek to improve processes is by implementing a lean strategy.

In the case of St. Luke’s Hospital, the organization needed to have reliable, optimized processes. This includes eliminating waste and creating employee engagement. St. Luke’s Hospital implemented a lean strategy to optimize process and hospital operations. The optimization process included examining and streamlining activities to make a more efficient work environment, higher customer satisfaction, and better business overall.

Empower the people

Employee attrition is normal throughout the rollout and post “go-live” period. It is important that the organization is prepared to provide initial learning opportunities for new hires and ongoing learning and performance support for all. Relying solely on training events can be a dangerous proposition. The workforce may be considered prepared after training events; however, they will require more exposure and learning opportunities in order to be considered experts.

A strategy focusing on performance and ongoing learning is vital for people to be proficient in current roles and transition rapidly to new roles effectively. When employees need to shift to a new seat in the process due to staffing changes, it is crucial they are able to move quickly and still perform. Additionally, today companies need to prepare for economic and business changes internally and externally. Continually supporting learning on the job helps people understand the entire process in which they perform their individual tasks and improve overall proficiency.

For example, my company recently partnered with a large supplier of office products. By developing and deploying business simulations, new employees were able to benefit from material already created. In the classroom, the instructor presented demonstrations of procedures and then participants could practice the corresponding processes in a simulated environment. This “learn then do” approach significantly reduced the demand on the IT staff and also provides a very flexible ongoing support model. New employees could immediately access these same assets and existing employees had these simulations and job aids.

Good work is more than knowing which buttons to push or transactions to execute within a business process. It is important for employees to be proficient with their tasks and transactions on day one of the “go live” but it is vital that people are able to continue to grow skills and be able to fill roles as the business and economy demands on day two and beyond.

In order to gauge your ability to grow and sustain employee performance, here are some questions to ask:

- Are people recognized for their agility within the business?
- Are people encouraged to reach beyond their current responsibilities?
- Are people compensated for increased responsibilities and capabilities?

The sustainment strategy related to people in the business is enabled by the positive answers to these questions.

Align with enabling technology

During the implementation of a significant software business application, the IT department typically owns the project, its successes and its failures. However, once the rollout to the business or operations group is complete, value and ownership is transferred to those in the business employing the application. The value from any initiative such as business software implementations or process optimizations belongs to the business itself. However, in most cases today, the IT organization enables that value to be recognized. The ongoing infrastructure and software ownership belongs to IT. Ensuring that there is a thriving, constructive relationship between the business and IT is one of the keys to the success of a strategy to sustain business value after investing in any major initiative.

The help desk and support team are crucial members of any organization. The processes that run these teams, regarding the new investment, need to be established and updated after a technology is implemented and rolled out. Relieving the IT support desk of calls and inquiries that start with the words "How do I" is vital. A significant part of a sound strategy to support employee learning and performance also enables the help desk. By establishing processes and practices to support employees in the business, we are reducing the dependence on the help desk and optimizing the related expenses. Empowering the help desk with methods and technologies to streamline their operations also raises the company bottom line. Using applications to provide visibility into actual usage of business applications allows the help desk personnel to be more proactive instead of reactive in solving problems, delays and expensive delays in productivity.

This visibility can be shared with the stakeholders in the business so that this constant view to performance, utilization, and proficiency can empower companies to take actions to improve performance, business value and always raise that bottom line.

Bottom line

The business, processes, people and technology all need to work in concert following the "go live" date of a new implementation or strategic business initiative. The organization must address updating and changing processes, continued learning and further integration of technology. If these aspects fall to the wayside due to distraction or lack of attention, the value originally expected of the initial investments will not be realized. A sustainment strategy is fundamental to ensuring that these aspects are addressed. All too often, we hear the need to do more with less. With the best sustainment strategies, we can realize more but do less.

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