

Communicating Change: Enterprise Software Survival Skill #1

Managers who have experienced an Enterprise software implementation will tell you that its biggest impact is on corporate culture. Employees' skills, habits and values must change as the company shifts focus and goals. The impact of these changes is nearly always underestimated.

For example, in some organizations an employee may be valued for his or her ability to navigate informal channels to obtain information. In this model, flexibility is prized over process. But Enterprise software implementations are by nature process-driven, and they bring a new value set that emphasizes data quality over ad-hoc methods and homegrown systems.

Additionally, Enterprise software systems require an employee's "world-view" to expand as the software makes data more generally available and shows off the relationships between tasks within complex business processes. Consistency and accuracy become more noticeable, and productivity measurement becomes the norm.



Some employees may not make this shift willingly. Initially, they may feel that the more creative aspects of their jobs are going away as everyone becomes more reliant on data from a single source. This is a false perception. Over the long term, Enterprise systems not only make employees more productive but also increase opportunities for individuals to make larger contributions, notice trends and anomalies in larger data sets and contribute to process improvements.

So how do you handle cultural changes stemming from an Enterprise software implementation? The steps in the process are not new.

Start early. Though the timeframe in which employees need to change work habits may be short, you can reduce the emotional impact of the change by starting early with targeted information campaigns and good training.

Align the leadership team. Make sure the team members not only understand the nature and benefits of the Enterprise system, but also the issues surrounding employee acceptance.

Set reasonable expectations. Employees should understand that, in the short term, they are only expected to achieve a basic level of competency. Beyond this transition period there will be many opportunities to excel and provide unique contributions.

Communicate specifically and continually. Each level and area of the organization has its own needs and issues. Develop a

plan that addresses the unique situations of specific group. Develop consistent and ongoing communication methods to keep staff updated on progress and involvement opportunities during the implementation period.

Identify new work teams and roles early. Enterprise software brings large adjustments to work roles and responsibilities. Identify and communicate these changes early, so affected employees fully understand and mentally prepare for the new environment.

Develop competency. Competency will provide comfort for most employees facing the new environment. Make sure everyone has a solid overall understanding of how work flows through the new system. Allow weeks of hands-on practice performing new job tasks in the software after formal training and prior to implementation.

When properly prepared, most employees will support changes, embrace the new Enterprise software, and adopt new values that ensure success.