End-User Buy-In, And How to Guarantee You Get It - During Your Next Software System Implementation.

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Failed Internet-based, software integrations and implementations aren't new; incompatibilities between people, change resistance, new processes and technologies have always been a concern. But as the research reveals – even after a decade of industry advice about helping employees to help themselves, gaining insight into customers, better performance from employees, and smoother business operations... we still see the paradox and "road block" of end-user, buy-in rejection.

I'm sure you've heard about the scenario or possibly even seen it at your own organization; the story is "classic". A business decides to upgrade it's "X" capabilities (training, CRM, data analysis system, ERP system, etc.,) with a new suite of applications. It performs its due diligence, finds the best system to suit its needs, and lays out the money for implementation and customization. Six months later... some employees (if not most...) are still working off of spreadsheets or in a notebook, etc.,

Bottom line – under no circumstances do they even want to go near the new, expensive system.

So, how do we resolve that? There's the old adage, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make 'em drink. When you are spending so much money on implementation and customization – is this response ok? What do you do? Do you "force" it on them? Do you make the system mandatory and require them to log in everyday or their fired?

Opinions? Let's take a closer look at 3 principles that when used correctly will "guarantee" a successful software system implementation... every single time.

Training.

I list training as the first of the three, as it is most important. However, when I say training... I actually mean two things:

1. System training

2. Positioning training or psychological training

System training is pretty self-explanatory. I'm sure you'll agree that having the proper manuals that walk the employees through the important parts of the system is necessary. But what else?

A more sophisticated method of training that can take the place of manuals and help documents is video tutorials or e-learning management training. Today, you can actually create interactive tutorial videos (pretty easily and cost-effectively), that literally take the user "by-the-hand" and walk them through a series of steps that they need to understand before the use the system. This type of training can be very effective in "showing" a user how to effectively leverage the system to their advantage... the right way vs. the wrong way to do things and how to be organized and efficient.

The problem with training is the most companies do not do it correctly (through the proper blending of repetition, frequency and reinforcement), which leads to poor use of the systems.

The second type of training that is as important to 'system training' (if not more important) is "positioning training". By "positioning training", I mean putting together a structured training plan that helps to ensure end user buy-in, right from the start. Incorporating PowerPoint slides or a video presentation that speaks specifically about the "whys" the system will make their lives easier is where you start. When information is carefully put at their fingertips, information that they would never have had readily available without your new technology is a huge benefit. Make sure you have some information to share about just that. An organized and orchestrated workflow process is another benefit that you want to purposely "push" to the front of their training. The key to all of this is proper positioning or "framing, if you will. When you position the benefits (not the features) properly and create some training around the "psychology" of why and how the new system will literally change their lives and the company's overall effectiveness and competitive edge – you go a long way to gain the proper mindshare and buy-in. Also, you may want to consider putting together small surveys or "poll" your employee audience with specific questions that will enable you to determine present skill levels. The survey method will actually help you in putting together your training presentations.

Having an e-learning management solution working for you can be a very cost-effective method to generating fantastic employee buy-in.

Management Buy-In

Another key factor and the second principle is having your managers become advocates of your new technology. They really need to set the example for the rest of the group. The way you do this is to set up specific training (there's training again.. that's why I say it is probably the most important thing you can do) for management that includes reporting, advanced tools, and methods to monitor and evaluate the use of your new system. Managers lead. When you can show the managers how many of their "administrative", time-consuming managerial "duties" are removed and their lives change as a result of using the system, e.g., better monitoring of their employees, quick information at their fingertips, increased productivity... they end up caring more about the system, and when they care and use it daily - the rest of the organization usually follows.

The Isolation of Champions

My highest recommendation in rolling out a new system, no matter how big is to start small. Elect a small group, a test pilot group to work through your system and provide feedback. By getting feedback from a small group of heavy users.. you are able to work out all the "kinks" before pushing the system out to the entire company. Pilot projects are also great in helping to establish realistic expectations, benchmarks and business goals of your new system.

You'll need to make sure you have "key" people representing all functional areas of the departments that will be using your new system... this way no group is left out, no stone left unturned and no room for excuses or complaints later on. When all employees get the sense that their opinions are important and more importantly, have been considered during the development and implementation process... their buy-in becomes more natural.

When you do this and you do this right – you actually develop "champions" of your new system, who will help bridge the gap between implementation and usability. Your champions will rally the troops around your new system and will help make your "launch" as successful as it can be.

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