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An Expert's Guide to ERP Success

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Chapter 1. Strategies for Preparedness

First Steps in ERP Readiness

It is incredibly common for companies to jump on the ERP bandwagon without first "getting their houses in order" (i.e., conducting the due diligence and planning required to make a project successful). Companies need to understand exactly who they are as an organization and what they want to be in the future. This covers everything from strengths to weaknesses, from core competencies to the areas in need of improvement. Making these decisions in the midst of an ERP implementation can make for a very rushed process and significant pain and confusion in the future.

We have worked with many companies that failed to define these important areas early in the ERP evaluation process. The companies that are able to implement ERP software the fastest, at the lowest costs, and with the least amount of pain are the ones that have a clear sense of direction and strategic priorities. These companies are in a strong position to let their business drive ERP technology, not the other way around. Many companies that fail at their ERP projects let the technology drive their business.

The key takeaway is that ERP cannot be implemented successfully without clear requirements, which are integral to ERP implementation success. By the same token, clear requirements cannot be defined until business processes are well defined. And business processes cannot be defined until organizations establish a clear sense of strategic direction. Organizations should ensure that these areas are taken into consideration during their ERP assessment and software selection processes.

Ready When You Are: Assessing ERP Readiness

Much of our research and experience focuses on ways to increase the likelihood of ERP success. But this begs an even larger and more fundamental question: is the company really ready for ERP?

Determining an organization's ERP readiness for an ERP implementation is often one of the most difficult parts of moving forward with such a large undertaking. It is easy to get caught up in all the potential benefits of ERP and forget that there are some fundamental business issues to consider before proceeding.

ERP Readiness Questions
For example, the following questions can be used to determine how ready your organization is for its ERP initiative:

- How standardized are your current business processes across the globe?
- Does your company currently have an internal organizational design, business process, and/or communications group?
- How much turmoil has your company faced in the last three years (e.g., layoffs, other large IT projects, management shakeups, etc.)?
- What level of executive sponsorship do you currently have in your organization?
- How many internal resources do you have committed to help with the project, including to address the business process aspects?

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- Do you have a documented business case, assumptions and ROI expectations?
- Have you established project and business measures for success?
- Is your company culture conducive to accept such a large change initiative?
- Does your company operate as a single company across the globe, or more as a siloed group of organizations?
- Do you have a detailed budget, including line items for miscellaneous and unanticipated expenses?
- Most importantly, what is your motive for implementing ERP?

While the answers to these questions may vary, they will inevitably impact the levels of project and business risk. They also will determine what additional mitigation efforts the company may need to take. These are all factors that need to be considered as part of an overall ERP software solution.

Keys to Building a Team for ERP Project Success

In addition to answering the above questions, organizations about to embark on an ERP initiative also need to build an effective ERP team. Below are some factors to keep in mind when creating an ERP project team:

- Opt for people that understand multiple parts of the business, not just their own little world.
- Opt for employees that demonstrate a willingness to change.
- Opt for influencers, those who can persuade and direct.
- Opt for employees that always look for a better way to get things done. Look for futurists.
- Opt for employees that are outgoing, people who get along with outsiders.
- Opt for contributors that are cooperative, resilient, yet strong in conviction.

Once you have chosen that team…

- Make ERP software their full-time job. The more time spent working with the ERP system, the better. A concentration of 50-percent on two jobs will breed failure in both.
- Back-fill their positions. Even if it is not full-time, there are some days that the core team will be involved all day, every day, especially near completion.
- Thoroughly explain the reason they were chosen and how they will accomplish the goals of the implementation.
- Allay their anxiety by developing a plan that includes managing both workloads.
- Introduce them to your expectations in the coming months.

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- Expectation of time spent
    - Working with outsiders
    - Presenting their needs to people who are not familiar with their daily activities, maybe numerous times

- Provide support

    - Give your team a place to express concerns openly
    - Plan team building events
    - Schedule meetings with your team, without everyone else, so they can discuss their progress openly
    - Reward their efforts with recognition and updates to the company on their performance

Remember, for many, this will be their first ERP implementation. They need to understand the process. Others will have been through this before and may recall the process as very stressful. Be sure your ERP project team understands their efforts are appreciated, and the company's success depends on their support and cooperation.

Five Steps to Define Your Enterprise Applications and IT Strategy

Although our company focuses on ERP selection, implementation and organizational change management, many of our clients ask for help defining their IT strategies as a precursor to a broader ERP software selection process. Since it is difficult to choose an ERP vendor without having a clear IT strategy in place, this approach makes perfect sense.

A lot of legwork needs to happen prior to defining an ERP strategy. Below are six steps to develop an IT strategy and framework:

1. **Define current enterprise systems inventory.** The first step is to identify the systems you have in place, which can be difficult to do if you belong to a complex organization. Companies that have grown quickly and/or acquired one or more other companies are more likely to have a hodgepodge of ERP systems, spreadsheets and other business software to run their operations. We often see companies with several hundred enterprise systems running their business, including a number of unauthorized "black market" systems that the IT department isn't even aware of. It is hard to determine a logical path forward without first understanding where you're starting.

2. **Rationalize current systems.** Once the systems have been inventoried, attention then needs to turn to which ones are core to the business or are providing competitive advantage to the organization. It is also important to assess each system's maintenance costs, pain points, flexibility, and scalability for future growth as well as evaluate the opportunity costs associated with business benefits that are lost due to poor systems. Once the systems have been evaluated using these and other key criteria, the company can move on to identifying what to do with each of them.

3. **Identify low-hanging fruit.** This is where the real fun begins. Once you have the quantitative assessment of each of the IT systems in the portfolio, you can start prioritizing which systems can or should be consolidated, upgraded or replaced. Typically there is significant "low-hanging fruit," or systems that will have an immediate and measurable impact when improved or replaced. In addition to identifying the projects that may have immediate value, you also should prioritize the non-low-hanging-fruit.

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4. **Identify your applications strategy.** Once you have priorities in place, your attention should then turn to your overall applications strategy. Based on your priorities, you will want to consider whether to pursue a single, consolidated ERP system, a best-of-breed solution, or a hybrid of both. This applications strategy should take not only your highest and most immediate priorities into consideration, but also the more intermediate and long-term priorities as well. Another key consideration is your hosting strategy: will you pursue software as a service (SaaS) or cloud solutions, on-premise software, or a combination of both? Single or multiple instance?

5. **Develop an IT strategy roadmap**. The above four steps will be crucial to developing your overall IT strategy roadmap. These inputs will help you identify a three- to five-year plan for improving your enterprise systems infrastructure. The plan often entails evaluation of potential ERP systems or other enterprise applications. In addition, the plan should identify how new systems will integrate to legacy systems, data consolidation and strategy, infrastructure upgrade requirements to support the new strategy, and organizational change management activities to support the new plan moving forward.

Though the above is obviously a very simplified overview of how to develop an effective IT strategy, it provides a good starting point.

ERP and Business Processes: As-Is Or To-Be?

One of the most contentious issues in the world of ERP and IT is how much attention to give to as-is and to-be ERP business processes. Opinions on the issue run the whole spectrum on how this should be addressed; some people feel that companies should let their ERP systems dictate what new processes will be, while others feel that as-is and to-be processes should be documented and analyzed in detail before selecting IT software. Many people, including myself, feel that the approach should fall somewhere in between.

It is helpful to break down the issues and look at each individual aspect of business processes to decide which approach is best for your company and your IT or ERP implementation.

As-Is Business Processes
This is one of the more controversial aspects of ERP projects. In our experiences with clients implementing ERP, IT or any other large business change initiative, we have found that there needs to be a decent amount of attention devoted to defining current business processes. The benefits of doing so are three-fold:

- It helps achieve alignment and understanding among various business units and geographies on how things currently operate. More often than not, especially in very large organizations, many managers and key stakeholders do not have a big-picture view of what other parts of the organization are doing. Documenting as-is business processes helps develop clarity on what is working well and what is broken with the current business processes.

- It helps define how employees are doing their work now, which helps define the gaps between current and future states. This is critical when it comes to organizational change management and training initiatives down the road.

- It helps determine the key operational pain points, and therefore the to-be processes and business requirements during the ERP software selection process.

This is not to say, however, that companies should spend an excessive amount of time documenting or over-analyzing current processes. At a minimum, organizations should develop level one detail around their current

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processes.

To-Be Business Processes
This area is very important as well. In order to develop the appropriate business requirements and select the software that is most effective for your business, you need to understand how you want your business processes to look in the future. Doing so provides four key benefits:

- It helps you define your future operational model and business processes independent of software. This allows you to think out of the box and look for opportunities to score big wins by leveraging IT as a tool to enable measurable business improvements. If you skip this step, you are more likely to be influenced by sales messages instead of functional fit.

- In conjunction with the as-is processes, it helps you identify the gaps between the current and future jobs, roles, and responsibilities. This is critical from an organizational change management perspective.

- It helps define key performance indicators to help drive business improvements and accountability. With new processes come new responsibilities and opportunities for improvement, so you need performance measures to enable this.

- It helps prioritize customization, integration, and report-writing needs after the software is selected. Without this understanding of where you want your organization to go from an operational perspective, it is very difficult to determine where customization and additional development is appropriate.

In short, I have found it helpful to view the business process aspects of your IT projects independent of the software itself. **Your future strategic direction and business processes should drive the ERP project, not the other way around.**

Taking the Time to Find the Right ERP Solution

ERP software selection can be a daunting task, and one that is often not given the appropriate attention. CIOs or other executives in charge of making such major decisions often make decisions based on perception, gut feel or faulty information. For example, executives often choose ERP software vendors based on what competitors or other large companies have chosen rather what is appropriate or inappropriate for their own company. Further, planning for a successful implementation involves more than choosing the right software; it also involves preparation to ensure that ERP enables measurable improvements to the business.

In choosing an ERP software package and planning for the overall project, executives need to make decisions based on objective and unbiased information. In particular, organizations should consider the following questions:

What Problems or Issues Will an ERP System Solve?
In many instances, ERP will not solve business problems. If business strategies or key business processes are flawed, even the most advanced ERP system is not going to help. Before making a decision as large as implementing a system that costs millions and affects the entire company, it's important to have a clear understanding of what the company wants to accomplish by taking on this challenge. There may be more cost-effective and lower-risk options such as improving processes, redesigning the organizational structure, consolidating the global supply chain, or implementing a performance management system. In these cases, choosing not to implement ERP might be the best solution. On the other hand, ERP might just be the business tool that enables these improvements.

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What are the Business Requirements?
If the company decides on ERP, it is important to begin by looking at the desired operational model and using that as a starting point in determining which software to implement. Executives should define and document key business requirements for any package they evaluate. This includes not only nice-to-haves, but also requirements that are "deal-breakers" if the software is unable to accommodate. In addition, executives should use ERP business requirements definition as an opportunity to improve current operations, efficiency and effectiveness. The last thing a company should do is implement software to automate the same flawed business processes. Instead, it should be focused on achieving measurable business value for the organization and should choose the software the best enables it to do this.

What is the Business Case and ROI?
This is where many companies fall flat. Even if an organization completes the first two items discussed above, it is important to understand and document what total costs will be for each ERP vendor under consideration, as well as anticipated business benefits. This is important in gaining approval from other executives or the Board of Directors, and it is also helps ensure that the organization realizes the potential benefits of implementing ERP. All costs, including hidden project costs such as internal project resources, data conversion, and lost productivity immediately following go-live, should be included in the business case and ROI calculation for each ERP vendor evaluated. In addition, benefits should be reasonable and not overly aggressive. Ultimately, the business case should be a tool to manage business costs, benefits and ROI going forward, not just as a sales tool to justify a decision that's already been made. And if the resulting ROI for a particular ERP vendor does not make sense or meet minimum investment criteria for the company, then it's probably not a good idea to undertake the project with that vendor.

Who Will Be the Implementation Partner?
Software companies aren't always the best at implementing their software, and some are more expensive than others. Companies must thoroughly assess all options offered by external implementation teams. Third-party vendors and consultants often can implement ERP more successfully or at a lower cost. It is also important to look at consulting firms that are capable of helping you manage the non-technical aspects of the project as well, such as organizational change management, training and benefits realization.

Are There Enough Resources to Commit to the Project?
Even if ERP is perfect for the company and it has chosen the perfect software, things will deteriorate very quickly if there aren't enough employees dedicated to the project. It doesn't matter if the company has assembled the best team of consultants and implementation partners; it's the employees that will ultimately make the project a success.

What's the Contingency Plan?
No matter how well run the project is, the company must be prepared for failure. We've all heard of the technical glitches that shut down shipping at Fortune 500 companies for weeks at a time, so it's best to acknowledge that something bad could happen. If the project does fail or if the software is not implemented correctly, what is the back-up plan? Will users be able to access legacy systems? Will certain processes be performed manually until the system is up? Dramatic failures are not common, but they do happen on occasion. Companies should be prepared for the "what-ifs."

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Mastering Your Game

Sports metaphors are often applicable to ERP initiatives. The stakes are high, competitors tough, and success and failure can hinge on seemingly small decisions.

The first step to organizational success is to achieve mastery at your game. This goes deeper than "What business are we in?" It goes to "How do we compete?" and "How do we make our money?"

Answer this question, "What are the drivers of your organization?" Some common drivers are: sales, process technology, raw material procurement, distribution efficiency, new product development, and customer service. Knowing and focusing on the drivers in your organization is critical because the drivers create the need for the tools to succeed. Your "players" win the game by using the tools your ERP solution provides.

It is critical to objectively verify your company's drivers and then take an unflinching inventory of the tools that support your drivers. Look for ideas and opportunities to improve or add to your tools inventory.

Every company has an internal set of beliefs about its strengths and weaknesses, but these are not always correct. Confirming drivers with external information is an essential step in knowing and focusing on them. It helps to identify the kind of tools that will promote winning.

Develop a list of the new tools the company wants this year (and not because they are affordable or "cool"). Rather identify and acquire new tools because they will help the organization win through mastery of your game. Remember that new tools will mean new processes and change.

Aligning ERP with Your Overall Business Strategy

Aligning an ERP implementation with a company's overall business strategy is a difficult and often overlooked component of a successful project. It is critical to take a top-down approach to define business processes to ultimately arrive at an ERP solution that fits the overall business. As stated previously, before you can configure a system to enable desired to-be processes, a company needs to define what these to-be processes look like. In order to understand its to-be processes, the company needs to know its operational strategy. And before defining its operational strategy, the company needs to define its overall corporate strategy and objectives.

Four Steps to Ensure Alignment

- Define your corporate strategy and objectives. Good questions to ask include "Where do you want the company to be in five years?" and "What operational strategy is required to enable this higher-level corporate strategy?"

- Once you have clearly articulated the company strategy, then you need to define the "to-be" business processes that will enable this corporate and operational strategy.

- Then, establish the performance measures at the corporate, operational, and business process levels. These measures should help you identify how successful you have been in executing against your defined strategy. They should also align with reports that come out of your ERP system.

- Finally, begin designing, configuring, and testing the system to ensure that it is aligned with the above.

The unfortunate truth is that most companies start with the last step and skip all the previous ones. By

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following all four, however, companies can be better prepared to ensure ERP alignment with overall company strategy.

Developing the ERP Business Case

A solid business case is one of the key aspects of preparing for an ERP project. One of the biggest selling points that ERP or IT software vendors use is that implementing their product can result in a short payback period with a healthy ROI. While there is some truth to this possibility, such an ROI is only achieved if you develop a realistic business case. This helps manage project expectations and manage business benefits after your ERP system is implemented. Some commonly overlooked aspects of developing a solid business case that will drive measurable business results:

- **Identify Hidden Costs.** Many costs associated with a large ERP implementation are obvious. For example, software licenses, implementation services and data conversion are all direct costs that make it into most business cases. However, there are others that are not so obvious, such as internal resources required to support the project team, costs to backfill the day-to-day work of project team members, process improvement, hardware upgrades, training and organizational change management. All of these costs should be included to accurately reflect the true total cost of ownership of your project.

- **Document Costs Associated with Benefits**. In many cases, technology makes a company more efficient, which may ultimately result in an overall headcount reduction. However, there are costs associated with reducing staff, such as severance and reorganization costs. In addition, even though there are long-term benefits associated with making employees more efficient and effective as a result of the new system, there is usually a short-term decrease in efficiency as employees learn. These costs should be quantified in a business case as well.

- **Track Benefits After Implementation.** Developing a business case is only half the battle; tracking and realizing business benefits is the other half. Prior to go-live, it is important to develop lower-level operational measures that directly relate to the dollars identified in the business case. These measures should then be assigned "owners" within the company who will be responsible for monitoring and tracking actual results. Then, after go-live, actual business benefits should be measured and compared to the business case on a regular basis to identify areas for improvement.

Obviously there are many other aspects to developing a business case. By avoiding these common pitfalls, however, you are much more likely to have an air-tight business case that drives measurable business results and contributes to an overall ERP benefits realization program.

Can Technology Hide Flawed Leadership?

This may be a bit rhetorical, but results from Panorama's ***2012 ERP Report*** beg the question: if a company is struggling with its overall corporate leadership, is technology going to help?

Nearly two out of three respondents to the survey (63-percent) indicated that they experienced problems addressing process and organizational change issues during their ERP implementations. Further, 29-percent of respondents noted that they did not have top-level management commitment. Clearly, an organization that is struggling to have buy-in at the top is going to struggle to have buy-in throughout the ranks. After all, if the executives can't see the benefits of a new ERP system then they're not going to be able to communicate the benefits of a new ERP system, much less address the business process and organizational management tasks

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so necessary for success.

Leadership, alignment and commitment from the executive level is key for any company's survival, but the lack of it may become clearer during a project as important and stressful as an ERP implementation. As was noted in the ***2012 ERP Report***, "Lack of commitment from key stakeholders can create a large amount of risk to the overall success of an ERP implementation process. However, strong executive sponsorship, proper business process blueprinting and strong, targeted training can go a long way in mitigating a lot of the organizational change management issues companies' face during an implementation."

So the question is, then, is a new IT system going to help a company improve its leadership and management? The short answer is "No." The ERP system may help improve process breakdowns, inefficiencies and other areas of concern but it is certainly not going to help a company decide which strategic direction to go or even inspire executives to lead their staff in that direction. In fact, the lack of a strong overall leadership and strategic direction is one of the biggest ERP and IT failure points and obstacles to benefits realization. Companies that have a clear strategic direction and vision – and are able to communicate it to their staff members – typically are much more successful at implementing technology and realizing its benefits.

The Role of ERP In Lean Six Sigma

Before beginning an ERP initiative, it is helpful to consider various toolsets that will help make the implementation successful. For example, Six Sigma provides a framework and toolset that makes ERP implementations more likely to succeed. Although the thought of tackling both initiatives at the same time may seem a bit overwhelming, Six Sigma provides a structured and methodical toolset that actually improves the success of ERP initiatives.

Below are five ways that Six Sigma methods can make your ERP implementation more successful and deliver more business benefits:

- **Measurement and reporting.** Six Sigma is all about measurement and analysis of data. All the dashboard and reporting capabilities in the world won't matter if you aren't able to provide data to end-users and decision makers in a way that is easy to analyze and understand. In addition, the data should be embedded into key business processes and benefits realization plans. Rather than throw a hodgepodge of reports and data at your end-users, your project should focus on providing performance measures that are critical to your business.

- **Focus on integrated business processes rather than functions.** Another component of Six Sigma is that it encourages a focus on integrated, end-to-end business processes. Most ERP systems have flexible and well-defined functional transactions embedded in the software, but these transactions will be ineffective if not defined in the context of the comprehensive business workflows specific to your business. Business processes should be mapped in a way that defines suppliers, inputs, processes, customers, and outputs (SIPCO) across the business. This process focus becomes the foundation for measurement capabilities, analysis of benefit opportunities, and system testing throughout the ERP implementation.

- **Focus on the customer.** At the end of the day, ERP best practices and efficient business processes don't really matter if they don't support your organization's ability to more effectively serve its customers. As business processes, performance measures, and corresponding software functionality are defined, they should be done so in the context of how they positively impact your internal and external customers.

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- **Reduce waste and non-value-add activity.** If you are implementing enterprise software to improve your business, then decisions during the system design and implementation phases should focus on reducing process inefficiencies and non-value-add activities. Business processes, performance measures, and system design should focus on eliminating waste.

- **Cause and effect diagrams and Pareto charts.** These two Six Sigma tools can be particularly helpful during an ERP implementation. During the design and implementation phase of the project, Pareto charts help define and differentiate between business processes and scenarios that are core to your business and those that are exceptions. Many companies get into trouble by configuring or customizing software to handle infrequent business events rather than focusing on those that make up 80-percent or more of your business volume, but Pareto charts can help measure and focus on those important activities. Similarly, cause and effect analysis or fishbone diagrams can be used to define root causes for failure to realize expected business benefits, especially once the implementation is complete and the software is in place.

Merging Best Practices Into ERP Software Initiatives

The term "best practices" is a bit loose and vaguely defined in the industry. ERP software vendors often interpret it as the way one of their biggest clients does business, which often becomes the pre-configured ERP solution for a given industry. However, best practices for one company may or may not relate to other organizations and is heavily dependent on the company's business model, competitive advantages, and other considerations. Given the diversity of functionality in most ERP solutions in the marketplace, who is to say which solution(s) provide the real best practices?

In addition to software vendors, some online tools and lower-end software selection consultants provide checklists or templates of "best practices." While there are large volumes of such information, the relevance to any given specific company is questionable. In addition, best practices are not checklists of functionality – they are efficient business processes that provide competitive advantage to your business.

So how does a company leverage best practices during their ERP initiatives? Here are three tips:

1. **Focus on measurable business improvements, efficiencies and non-value-added activities.** Every company is different with unique competitive advantages. Some are extremely customer-centric, while others contain costs via efficient supply chain management processes. The key is to identify and measure the areas that are most important to your business and provide the greatest opportunities for ERP to improve your results. One you have done this, it is easier to identify potential ERP systems that will provide more efficient or effective business processes to support your operations.

2. **Leverage benchmarks and data to drive improvements.** Consultants with a broad view of the ERP space, your industry vertical and data to support ERP initiatives are likely to bring best practices from other clients. Be leery of consultants or vendors that have a canned best-practice solution.

3. **Standardize processes that aren't differentiators to your business.** If part of your business isn't providing a competitive advantage (e.g., financials, A/R, A/P, fixed assets, and warehouse management), then chances are most ERP solutions have standardized functionality to provide standardized and proven efficiencies. If a particular business function is competitive or unique to your business, however, it is less likely that most ERP software vendors will provide standardized best practices, and less likely that you would want to leverage generic functionality used by other companies. Examples of areas that are differentiators and more difficult to find in most ERP packages include product configuration, process manufacturing and vendor-managed inventory.

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About the Author

After 15 years of ERP consulting at large firms including PricewaterhouseCoopers and SchlumbergerSema, Eric Kimberling realized the need for an independent consulting firm that really understands both ERP and the business benefits it can enable. He currently serves as the managing partner of Panorama Consulting Solutions, the world's leading independent ERP consultant.

Eric began his career as an ERP organizational change management consultant and eventually broadened his background to include implementation project management and software selection. Eric's background includes extensive ERP software selection, ERP organizational change, and ERP implementation project management experience.

Throughout his career, Eric has helped dozens of high-profile and global companies with their ERP initiatives, including Kodak, Samsonite, Coors, Duke Energy, and Lucent Technologies to name a few. In addition to extensive ERP experience, Eric has also helped clients with business process re-engineering, merger and acquisition integration, strategic planning, and Six Sigma. Eric holds an MBA from Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver.

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