Implementing Global IT Systems: Avoid the “Global Roll Out”

by Ted Farrington

With over 30 years of experience working in research and development (R&D) for a variety of companies and industries, I've seen my fair share of information technology (IT) systems implemented to support various global processes such as product lifecycle management (PLM), phase-gate, portfolio management, legal and finance.

Having observed these projects from all angles, I began to notice a pattern behind some of the most common mistakes being made during the implementation of large global IT systems in support of R&D or other business processes.

This series provides leading practices for avoiding the top ten most common mistakes.

Mistake #1: Avoid the Global Roll Out

Invest the time to reach agreement on a global process from the start.

I was once at a kick-off meeting for a global IT system project aiming for implementation across seven campuses around the world. Only one campus—headquarters—was represented at the meeting. When I asked who was representing the other sites, I was told, “We’ll design and launch the system here first, then roll it out across the other campuses.”

You should never start a global IT project in the R&D process space with that mindset. It may take extra effort to include all campuses in the early phases of a project, but the dividends are paid back in the end because the project has buy-in from everyone when it goes live. You can either invest this time up front and have ownership from everyone at the start, or you can wait and pay the price on the back end when other locations resist implementation.

Here are some leading practices for avoiding the global roll out:

Keep processes simple

We all know that in large, multi-campus organizations, headquarters are often the most bureaucratic locations. Processes are overly complex with everyone needing to approve everything for many different reasons, including politics. The owners of all approving functions such as regulatory, safety, legal, etc. are all on site; probably with their own individual complex processes. Why model a system after the most complex location and then use an IT system to spread this complexity? Simplicity increases with distance from HQ for a variety of reasons. Isn’t simplicity what we want?

Tap your talent

There are many smart people spread across any large, multi-campus organization, so best practices can be found anywhere and everywhere. Why limit the project to the best practices of a single location? Unique perspectives and insights should be sought out at the start of the project to design the best IT tool possible.

Check for alignment

The culture and process richness of different campuses in a global organization are driven more by the behavior of their leaders than their countries of residence. So the strengths, weaknesses and challenges faced on these campuses may be very different regardless of location. You would be surprised at the number of times I’ve seen a single campus develop a new process with IT support to address a specific problem, then try to roll it out globally, only to learn no one else had the same problem!
Bottom line

if you're leading a global IT system implementation for PLM, phase-gate, project portfolio management (PPM), or any other process, bring all locations and stakeholders to the table right from the start! You'll have a much more successful and sustainable project in the end with a much higher return on your investment.

Stay tuned to discover leading practices for avoiding these ten common mistakes. Being mindful of the challenges and solutions discussed in this series will greatly increase the chances of your next project becoming a sustainable success.

The Entire Top Ten List:

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Top Ten Mistakes Made Implementing IT Systems and How to Avoid Them

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What's your view? Add your question or comment
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Ted’s 35 years of research and development experience were built in the CPG industry, where he held leadership roles in advanced research and R&D. As a fellow at Kalypso, he uses his years of experience in breakthrough innovation, research foresight and R&D business processes & systems to support clients.