

Implementing Global IT Systems: Don't Ignore Inconsistencies

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 #4: Ignoring Inconsistencies

Start off on the right foot by aligning on terminology and processes

Implementing an IT system is challenging enough in a single location, but add multiple campuses to the mix and new and unique challenges begin to arise. The biggest of which is simply starting off on the right foot with all campuses aligned on processes and terminology. To avoid the "Who's on first?" routine, take the following steps to ensure global organizational alignment.

First – Get everyone on the same page of the dictionary

This can be a huge undertaking if you have multiple campuses using different processes and sometimes even different languages. On one project I was a part of, we had several campuses around the world that had been acquired over the years and each had different development processes and terminology. For example, the meaning of the word "prototype" was different to people in different locations. Set the standard definition for common words used throughout the process to avoid confusion and a lot of headaches while designing and implementing an IT system.

Second – Harmonize to leading practices

At the first face-to-face meeting of the previously mentioned project, representatives (product developers, not managers) from each campus presented the development processes and approvals they each used. Requirements, work flows and approvals to move forward varied greatly from campus to campus, as did leading practices. Someone asked,

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“Why do I need this approval when you don’t at your location?”

This process forces approving functions to reevaluate and make their requirements globally consistent. It took about a year to agree on a global development process with common steps and approvals that met the business requirements for that project. While not jumping right into system design drove some folks nuts, it was a year well spent and paid great dividends in the end. Remember, a leading practice can be found anywhere!

Design globally and only modify locally if needed. Limit local modifications to the global process developed by the team to those demanded by local business requirements; usually by a country’s regulatory agencies. This maintains consistency in process and terminology so that all that work put into achieving global alignment doesn’t go to waste.

Finally – Ask yourself, is the organization really ready for this?

Large multi-campus organizations, like R&D, go through stages of development. They often start out as operational silos, supporting their local business units. After some time, they may share information for the sake of efficiency. To eliminate redundant work, they may develop into centers of excellence. Ultimately, they can become interdependent, where the objectives of each site depend on work done at other locations.

At this point, project and product information must pass seamlessly from campus to campus in near real-time and an IT system becomes a necessary resource to support that effort. While having a global PLM system may sound exciting to an organization running as a bunch of silos, often, there isn’t a burning platform that will justify the effort required until the organization is closer to the interdependent state.

Ignoring inconsistencies is a sure-fire way to set yourself up for failure and unnecessary headaches. By establishing global alignment from the beginning of the project, you ensure maximum efficiency and eliminate redundancies throughout the process.

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:

1. The "Global" Roll Out	6. Jumping the Gun
2. Playing the Shell Game	7. Skipping Stakeholders
3. The "Fix All" Solution	8. Skipping the Dress Rehearsal
4. Ignoring Inconsistencies	9. Self-Gathering Data
5. Missing the Point	10. DIY Projects

Download the eBook:

[Top Ten Mistakes Made Implementing IT Systems and How to Avoid Them](#)

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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.