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Increasing Business Efficiency and End-User Productivity

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Capturing organizational knowledge and increasing productivity are critical to remaining competitive in today's marketplace. Tools that document and effectively deploy organizational best practices can provide valuable assistance in today's uncertain economic conditions. Whether organizations are hunkering down to survive or looking to make strategic maneuvers to better position themselves in key markets, they can gain efficiencies by standardizing on one training platform for the capture and maintenance of their organizational knowledge, including the proper use of their enterprise applications. Essentially, tools should be leveraged that help address the challenges of current economic conditions — workforce fluctuation, travel restrictions, reduced training budgets — and meet expectations of faster ROI on enterprise application implementations or upgrades. After all, there will be a turn in the economy, and having documented business processes, policies, and procedures as well as trained end users will be a strategic advantage for any organization.

The following questions were posed by Oracle to Michael Fauscette, group vice president of IDC's Software Business Solutions research, on behalf of Oracle's customers.

Q. Why is it so important, especially in today's economy, to quickly and consistently create, maintain, and deploy business process documentation? And what are the benefits of having up-to-date business process documentation?

A. It's very important for companies to come up with ways to capture all types of corporate information; you'd be amazed how many employees inside a company don't really know or understand the basic business processes. Business process documentation should ultimately teach people when and how to interact with the systems in the context of their daily jobs. For this type of corporate knowledge, organizations can't rely on traditional content management systems for knowledge capture and dissemination. The business processes need to be captured and deployed in a way that is interactive and promotes the rapid uptake of critical policies and procedures and the inevitable changes they will undergo over time.

In today's economy, business process documentation becomes even more important because of higher employee turnover. Larger companies, especially, must deal with higher churn rates because of downsizing and job changes. It's more difficult to ensure that new employees use the system in a way that's consistent with what was intended. Large companies also have a need for greater flexibility, where the organization must respond to different types of competition, for example, or changing customer requirements. Companies must be flexible enough to change their business processes to drive their business strategy in a different direction.

Business process documentation is important in smaller companies, too, because there may be only one person who does a critical job. If that person goes away for whatever reason, you've lost critical knowledge needed to run the business correctly.

Companies that spend time and resources documenting business processes need to be aware that those processes will evolve over time. If there is not a method in place to audit and update the processes, the value of this effort diminishes.

Companies must figure out a way to capture knowledge, not only to secure it but also to use the content going forward and keep it useful, current, and interactive. It's an ongoing process. It starts at system implementation and runs all the way through the life of your interaction with that system and your overall business. In my opinion, it's crucial to the success or failure of any IT project — and, in these times, to the business itself. Companies need the right tools to support knowledge capture and dissemination.

Q. Can you review the evidence regarding end-user adoption as the key to a successful enterprise application rollout, and what are the steps a company should take to ensure adoption of the new system?

A. I think many people would be surprised to learn that, in fact, approximately 24% of IT projects today are seen as failures. Similarly, about 44% of projects are seen as challenged, over budget, or late and/or not having the required features and functions. That leaves us with a success rate of only 32%. Now of course this is related to many different factors, not just the use (or lack of use) of a tool and a method to capture the future state model for use in end-user training. But it is a contributor, especially in the "challenged" projects.

Every company, software vendor, and systems integrator has its own unique methodology for implementing a project, but in all methodologies, some common steps have to be accomplished. One of those steps is change management, which involves effectively training people in the organization on how they will be using the new application to do their jobs. It is critical to train people on what has changed, what is new, and what stays the same and to repeat that training with new people.

Companies need to use a consistent system of capturing, documenting, and maintaining the ways of using the new system correctly, as well as the business processes that describe the larger context. If this content is automated in the system, you can make sure it remains current and relevant to the business much more easily and cost-effectively than updating training manuals that sit on bookshelves.

Easy access provided by an interactive way to train people becomes even more important when the process is performed only occasionally, once or twice a year, rather than frequently. Studies have shown that nearly 100% of the time, people will return for help to whatever material they were trained with. If you trained them from a manual, they will go back to the manual. Giving employees access to critical process information online will help ensure that they look up the approved, up-to-date approach when they have a question about what to do.

Q. Many companies today are striving to achieve a faster time to ROI on their enterprise application upgrade or implementation projects. How do you propose they achieve this milestone?

A. Faster time to ROI is one of the most talked about subjects lately, especially in this economy, because companies have a much lower tolerance for long, painful implementations. Many factors play into ROI, of course, but documenting implementation decisions and new or revised business processes in a way that is interactive, relevant, and in context using a tool

that enables long-term maintenance of the information can add greatly to end-user adoption and thus facilitate faster time to value.

Many of these implementation projects have a prototyping phase, for example, where lots of decisions are made and a lot of information is generated. If you don't capture that information correctly, and in a way that can be used throughout the project and throughout the life cycle of the system, you create problems in the project now as well as a long-term training/change management challenge. You're going to constantly be going back and asking about what decisions were made and how certain processes were designed. When easy-to-use documentation tools are utilized in the prototype, it is more likely that the approved use of a new application will be communicated appropriately to the end users.

If you capture this information in an automated system that's tied to your software and actually helps you generate the business process underneath those decisions, you can speed up the time to value a great deal. You also get more value in the longer term because those processes can then be updated and maintained.

When the goal is knowledge transfer and change management, it's vitally important to have an automated tool that can tie directly to the business process, as well as tie directly to the software that will deliver that extra value to you.

Q. An enterprise application project cannot be considered finished at "go-live" if organizations are to gain the new business efficiencies that the project was intended to provide. How do you educate companies on this concept, in terms of the role that application performance support plays in the long-term success of these projects?

A. We've discussed some of the drivers behind the need for greater business efficiencies around application performance support — the impact of a slowing economy, for example, and the fact that there tends to be greater churn in larger companies. We also mentioned the issue of smaller companies being more vulnerable to knowledge loss because often only one person knows the system well.

In the past, help or performance support was usually coded in a way that required an IT project to change it, and that's not an effective use of the tools available now. What you really need is something that can be maintained by users or administrators and can constantly evolve as the business environment changes and processes change with it. As you use the system more, you learn more and become more effective. This way, the system is a consistent map of what you really do in the real world versus the old exception documents that were generated after the fact.

Things like exception documents ("You don't really do it the way it says") create problems and inefficiencies and become a built-in part of your business. When you have a way to drive out those inefficiencies, obviously there's a return — by generating more revenue or cutting costs or driving more quality and innovation. But you'll never have that ability if you cannot keep application performance support in synch with what you're really doing in the business.

Q. "Doing more with less" is a common theme in today's marketplace, even though new and ongoing projects are critical to the health of the business. What guidance can you offer to assist in justifying ongoing IT investments as well as deployment strategies?

A. I think this slower business environment is analogous to the old maxim in the manufacturing world: "When do you do the most maintenance and updating of your equipment? When business is slow." You can't afford to do it when things are fast because you're generating revenue. So the best time to look at internal IT projects that give you a boost in competitive

advantage or a high return on your investment is when times are slow. Make the investment now while things are slower because you can then take advantage as the recovery unfolds.

If you've implemented a system and are not getting the return expected, this is the time to go back and solve the problem. Review and optimize your business processes in conjunction with optimizing your IT investments. Set up an automated way to capture your business processes in the application, make sure the business processes are optimized to your market situation today, and get to a place where you can use that system really effectively when your business begins growing again and you no longer have the time. Be prepared for business expansion by providing the tools for training and knowledge transfer. Get rid of that old hardcopy documentation and put in place automated processes to continually drive value from your system and your investment over time.

ABOUT THIS ANALYST

Michael Fauscette leads IDC's Software Business Solutions group, which includes research and consulting in ERP, SCM, CRM, and PLM applications (and the associated business process that the software supports), small and medium-sized business applications, partner and alliance ecosystems, open source, software vendor business models (SaaS), and software pricing and licensing. With extensive executive experience with software vendors ranging from large enterprise companies to small Silicon Valley start-ups, Mr. Fauscette brings a unique perspective by relating research data and trends to the overall strategic focus and go-to-market strategy of application software companies.

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