

Understanding the Roadblocks Preventing On-time Information Systems Integration

This report focuses on five major roadblocks preventing on-time systems integration projects. Whether your systems integration is intended for the entire company or one division, roadblocks can impede your progress. To ensure a successful integration, plan for the road ahead.

Inadequate Executive Sponsorship and Support

Executive sponsorship and continued support of a system integration project are basic requirements. If not present, they form the first roadblock.

If you believe in the project and want it to move forward, the first step is to gain support for it from those who matter most. You'll find executives readily rally behind projects when they understand:

- Why the current situation isn't working as well as it could
- The overall value it will add to the company
- Its importance in relation to other projects currently in progress or being considered
- How the project team plans to mitigate risk and manage change

With executive sponsorship and support solidly in place, it's time to build a team.

Weak Project Team

System integration projects must be executed by a dedicated team—not only dedicated to spending time on the project but also, as a member of the team, dedicated to its success. A team haphazardly assembled presents another roadblock.

The team should be defined at the start of the project and all its members need to completely

understand their new role and the responsibilities that come with the assignment.

Corporate departments impacted by the project, such as IT and Operations, should be involved from day one. Not involving the right people on an ongoing basis often results in confusion over responsibilities, unwanted *territorial stances*, and lack of ownership and commitment.

Communication is a key to project success. Managing the project team means managing the communication between all its members for the life of the project.

To address the need for temporary, experienced staffing, companies often ask for greater involvement of the software provider and even a third-party integrator, a fundamentally sound idea. However, the presence of outside help can lull the project team into thinking there's less work to do internally and underestimate the portion of work they must take on themselves.

Poor Project Plan

Another roadblock to on-time system integration is the lack of a plan—a complete plan whose details are ultimately agreed upon by key project team members.

During the initial planning stage of a project, the team needs to formalize realizable goals and objectives. They should keep in mind that if they try to implement more technology than needed, it will be impossible to coordinate all the various and complex activities in parallel.

The timeline of the project needs to be realistically thought through and adequate time allotted for required tasks. An unrealistic timeline can lead to missed deadlines, and if too little time is allocated, tasks cannot be completed. Too much time allocated, and any sense of urgency can be lost and the project loses momentum.

A thoroughly detailed project schedule is a must. A Gantt chart, listing tasks, responsible parties and timeframes for completion is a proven tool for success if followed and updated throughout the life of the project. Without a detailed schedule, all sense of direction is lost and project team members start to focus on their own agendas rather than what is best for the project as a whole.

Poor transition planning, timing and coordination of activities can lead to costly delays or system downtime. Leave plenty of time for thoughtful decision-making.

Misguided System and Operations Design

Another roadblock will be in your way if business requirements aren't clearly spelled out and officially approved. Using the requirements as a

map, the next step in any system integration project is to create a system design document. The document should explain in detail the operations and system requirements. This will be used repeatedly throughout the project to review progress, identify system configuration requirements and any modifications and to develop test scripts and training documentation. If the overall design and plan are not well defined, scope changes occur resulting in longer schedules and missed dates.

End-user Involvement MIA

The final roadblock is neglecting to educate and empower end users. Even when they are not personally involved in daily project activities, they should be kept up-to-date with progress via newsletters and postings thorough the facility. Given ample time for testing and training, end-users will accept the system and the project will proceed smoothly.

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