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QUARTERLY

Skilled & Ready: A Case Study of Rapid Implementation

With the advances that are being made with today's client-server technology, many organizations are turning to reliable, maintainable, and user-friendly HR systems to help them cut down on the paperwork and streamline business processes. Of course, finding a system that meets the organization's needs, is usually not a problem. Implementing the new system however, is typically not that easy. Faced with problems due to limited people, money, time, and experience, delivering a project on-time and on-budget is often a terrific challenge for project teams. In fact, as one project team from a federal law enforcement agency discovered, implementing these new systems is very similar to apprehending federal criminals; luckily they had some experience with the latter. In this column, you will learn how this

agency's project team and a plan of action (Rapid Implementation Methodology - R.I.M.), was able to successfully carry out their mission.

The agency serves the nation through a variety of vital law enforcement activities. These activities require rapid and efficient responses from the law enforcement personnel who are called upon for various missions and from employees like those from human resources that assist "behind the scenes." To assist them with these critical missions, as well as day-to-day activities, the agency needed a new HR system. To implement this new system, however, the agency's project team needed a process, some direction on how to get started, and some guidance throughout the entire project. They did not need, or want, lots of consultants coming in and taking over. They wanted to have ownership of

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the project. What they needed was a jump-start and the right tools and they needed it quickly.

Having never been involved in an implementation before, R.I.M. offered this project team, a simple, yet powerful solution for implementing a new system with the limited resources they had available. R.I.M. is a proven methodology that supports the entire implementation life cycle, providing a road map for the project team to follow and a tool-kit with measurement tools, benchmarks, matrices, and charts, to use throughout the project. R.I.M.'s total implementation process is broken down into four different stages:

- Planning
- Rapid Re-engineering
- Testing
- Production

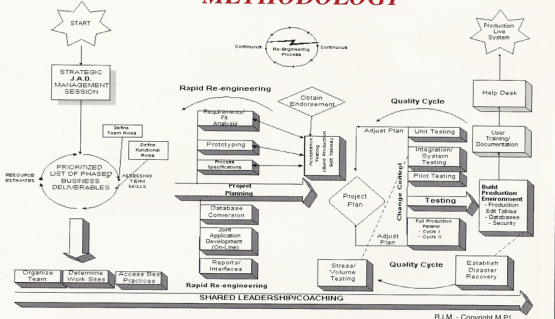
Often activities in one stage occur concurrently with activities in another stage. R.I.M. is unique in that it is a methodology for handling multiple steps of a project (or projects) simultaneously. See Figure A for the Total Implementation Chart.

Planning

In the planning stage, the project team established their position and designed a plan to tackle the project. First the team evaluated the business constraints of doing the project — deadlines, dependencies on other business objectives, financial year ends, peak business periods when resources may be taken — and identified the scope, assumptions, and some up-front risks associated with the project. Next an executive J.A.D. (Joint Application Development) session was conducted to identify business deliverables that would be delivered during this first phase of the project. Phasing is a means to mitigate the risk of

Figure A

RAPID IMPLEMENTATION METHODOLOGY



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an implementation. It provides faster return on investment.

The agency decided to implement in incremental phases. The Skills Inventory process was identified by the agency's officials as one of the key operational areas that needed tracking. In the past, the agency had no automated way to find skilled people for special missions. For example, when a hurricane swept through Puerto Rico last year and they needed personnel who spoke Spanish, or when the plane crashed near Long Island and they needed men and women who could scuba dive, the agency had to put in calls to all offices across the nation searching for someone who fit the criteria for the assignment. By tracking skill information on this new system, the speed and accuracy of the search for qualified deputies will be greatly improved. With the PeopleSoft skills profile database, these skill searches will take seconds rather than critical hours or even days. Obviously, bringing this module up in the first phase was something that was critical to the agency and it would be a great "win" for the agency's project team.

Once the deliverables, dates, and resources were decided upon, the project plan was developed. The project plan provided the road map for the entire project, specifying the what (tasks), the when (estimated dates) and the who (resources). R.I.M. provided the how (tool-kit with matrices, benchmarks, charts, and quality controls). With this plan, the agency was able to track the progress (% complete) of the project, anticipated future problems, and corrected delays before they had a severe impact (e.g., the installation of PeopleSoft at remote sites was anticipated far in advance so that delays would not affect Pilot Testing). The project plan also was a communication tool used so that all parties involved in the project could be engaged and kept up to date with the progress of the project.

Rapid Re-engineering

Traditional re-engineering can be a lengthy process because it typically originates from a zero base. But given the resources and time available to this project team (and most project teams), a lengthy process wasn't going to work. R.I.M. follows a quality-driven, rapid development process

that offers the project team considerable time compression. Capitalizing on work done in each phase of the project is a basic principle embedded in R.I.M. and it enables project teams to condense timelines significantly. R.I.M. combines the three components of the implementation process — Fit Analysis, Prototyping and Rapid Re-engineering — into one time-compressed process.

At the start of the project, the agency's functional business "experts" in their respective field were chosen to lead the Rapid Re-engineering Design (R.R.D.) process as they are the individuals who best understand the underlying agency policies and procedures. The "fit" (not the "gap") to the new system was evaluated, the data was examined in terms of redundancies, inaccuracies or lack of use or interest. For the Skills Module, in-depth interviews with the business community were also conducted to determine how the agency wanted to track skills on the new system. As this progressed, customizations (minimal), edits, interfaces, reports, etc., were identified and carefully documented. This process allowed the analysts to clearly define how the end-user would use the new system, to provide detailed input to the requirements and design, and to begin training on the new system. Concurrent with this process, technical representatives were prepared to convert all data from the existing system, as well as setting up the basic environment for databases and their administration. Note: The agency uses the National Finance Center (NFC), their current HR and Payroll system, as the system of record for personnel information (job, personal, and employee data). At this point, panels containing the core employee data were populated via downloads of the NFC system to PeopleSoft.

Testing

The methodology calls for several "quality" testing cycles. The project team performed acceptance testing of the system at the same time they were doing the fit analysis. After development of the system was completed, the team went through unit testing, integration or string testing (cradle to grave), two pilot cycles, and a production parallel cycle (if necessary, the team was prepared to do two production cycles before going live). Performance and stress testing of the new

system was also addressed throughout the testing phase.

Production

Security, a critical issue for all organizations, is obviously a top priority when implementing a new system. Throughout the project and into production, the agency's team took steps to ensure that the security of the data was kept in check. Maintenance of the system after "going live" was another key issue. Contingency plans, disaster recovery plans, and back-ups have been and will continue to be addressed during the production stage. In this final stage, the team also developed a strategy for future phases.

Partnerships/Shared Leadership

Throughout the project, and especially during the R.R.D. process, collaboration between the technical team and the functional team is essential in evaluating the requirements of the new system. Not only does this allow for maximum input from both communities, but it also forges a partnership between the two communities, which enables project teams to advance quickly from requirements collection into rapid prototyping and development. In this case, this collaboration and shared leadership involved not only the business and technical representatives, but the executive sponsors, the consultants, the vendor, representatives from budget, and other federal components. These partnerships helped ensure a successful implementation and a satisfied user community.

At the conclusion of this first project phase, there is now a better understanding of technology among the business community, improved collaboration between HR, IT and Budget, and an empowered and educated in-house team ready for the next phases of the implementation. Rather than knowledge collecting by consultants there was knowledge transfer to the internal team members. R.I.M. emphasizes the importance of enabling and empowering the team to take shared ownership and accountability of the project. At the agency, employees were partnered with consultants throughout the project. As a result, an in-house brain trust has developed that will allow the agency to save time and money as additional modules are brought up or upgrades take place. The team is educated and equipped with the tools that will help them to continue to be successful. The R.I.M. road map is re-usable and the internal team can map to capitalize on what they have learned during the first phase of their project.

Client-server technology is a giant leap forward for organizations like this because it allows them to record and share data in ways they have never been able to before. With a powerful tool like PeopleSoft, human resources, benefits and payroll representatives throughout organizations will be able to move away from their traditional roles in administration and problem resolution and will be able to play more strategic roles. In this case, HR will be able to use this new technology to help shape the future of how the agency will operate and as additional modules are brought up in the system, assist the other divisions with the day-to-day missions of the agency.

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