

Effective Implementation Management Needs an IT Entrepreneur

Having technology and using it effectively are two different matters. For instance, when multiple hurricanes hit the United States this year, power companies in the mid-Atlantic states were criticized for failing to communicate effectively with their customers. An audit of one of the utility's performance concluded that, while the utility had the technology to keep customers better informed, the company had not implemented it effectively during the crisis.

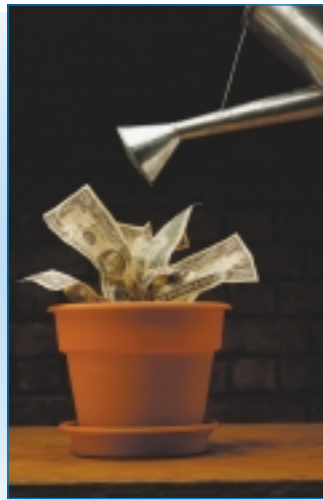
Such a breach between acquisition and implementation has been termed an "assimilation gap" by technology management researchers and authors Chris Kemerer and Robert Fichman. When the gap grows too wide between the expectations of the purchaser of the technology and those who are trying to implement it, the technology may end up on a shelf and the whole investment can be lost.

How can managers increase their chances for success with new technologies?

As a start, organizations seeking to take advantage of emerging information technologies should invest in rigorous project management and software methodology training.

As successful IT managers know, traditional project management techniques are not sufficient to address the long period often required for effective IT implementation. In Fichman and Kemerer's study, for instance, only 57 percent of firms attempting to implement relational database technology had achieved what they considered full-scale success after four years.

A complex new technology often requires significant organizational learning, changes to business processes,



and new attitudes and behaviors on the part of managers and staff using the technology. This extended period of adaptation to and assimilation of the new technology requires implementation management, a discipline that focuses on the period after the delivery or acquisition of the information system.

Are there any keys or rules of thumb that can help managers successfully negotiate the challenges of this period?

Probably the most important rule of implementation management is to encourage managers to act like entrepreneurs—to exploit opportunity wherever it may exist.

The traditional manager, perceives he or she has the responsibility to be the guardian of the existing enterprise's interests. In fulfilling his or her role, the traditional manager may hesitate to promote adoption of a new technology if doing so would appear to threaten (even in a minor way) the health of a business line or strength of a customer relationship.

The entrepreneurial manager, on the other hand, would act more boldly. The entrepreneur would address the issue with a longer term view—will the proposed new technology eventually be better for the corporation and lead to even stronger customer relationships? If so, the entrepreneur would reason, adoption of the new technology should be aggressively promoted.

The IT entrepreneur is willing to expend the effort necessary to push the invention or new approach across the assimilation gap and into the fabric of the organization.

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Because of this broader perspective, the entrepreneurial manager often better understands the usefulness of an idea beyond the bounds of the immediate problem area. In addition, the entrepreneur is willing to expend the effort necessary to push the invention or new approach across the assimilation gap and into the fabric of the organization. And the entrepreneur is willing to tolerate a somewhat higher level of risk in executing the project's adoption allowing for more creative approaches to in-process problem solving.

Although acting like an entrepreneur takes skills and attitudes that may be somewhat foreign to traditional technical IT project managers, managers who want their projects to succeed beyond the mere completion and delivery of the system must accept the challenge to fill this entrepreneurial role.

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