Organizations seeking breakthroughs to accelerate their business growth often gravitate toward technology solutions. By removing friction from both customer-facing interactions and back-office processes, enterprise wide technology solutions can help firms achieve continued competitive differentiation, accelerate value capture, and provide a path for continued organic and inorganic growth.

Enterprise-level technology selection, implementation, and adoption is a complex and risky endeavor. Organizations must be prepared to change processes, restructure functions, and increase transparency of business-critical information. Though organizations strive to successfully leverage enterprise wide technology, 66% will realize less than 50% of the expected benefits projected for their technology solution.

With this alarming failure rate in mind, how can organizations successfully implement and utilize technology solutions to gain both short- and long-term benefits? Leveraging our understanding of numerous complex enterprise technology implementation initiatives, as well as considering the risk any transformational change creates in organizations, we advocate the following leading practices to accelerate implementation success and return on investment.

1. **Gain Leadership Sponsorship on Strategy and Optimal Technology Solution:**

   The most critical element for successful technology implementation and adoption is cross-functional leadership buy-in, alignment, and long-term sponsorship. Active, visible executive sponsorship is the greatest contributor to successful adoption of the enterprise technology being implemented. Leadership teams must treat a potential technology implementation not as an isolated technology effort, but rather as a strategic business initiative. Leaders must define the "why" behind the technology solution and determine how the technology will impact the organization's overarching strategy.

   In addition, it is critical for leadership teams to avoid placing enterprise technology initiatives in functional silos. Relegating an implementation effort to specific functions (e.g., IT or Finance) will limit overall alignment on the criticality of the implementation and deprive leadership teams the opportunity to holistically determine the strategic impact of the technology across functional boundaries. Provide seats at the table for all relevant and impacted functional leaders to dramatically increase future success.

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2. Assess Existing Operating Model and Envision the Future State:

In order to maximize the benefit of the selected technology solution, it is important for organizations to understand how the technology will impact the existing business model. This will require organizations to carefully examine how the business is being run, including the current state organizational structure and cross-organizational business processes. Once the current state has been assessed, a future state must be envisioned, with the technology solution firmly in mind. It is critical for leaders to allocate appropriate time to fully understand the technology. This time will be well spent when optimally designing the future state. Leaders will then need to consider ways to adjust the future state operating model to maximize the value derived from the selected technology.

3. Define and Understand the Implementation’s Complexity:

Once leadership has aligned on the strategic value of an enterprise technology initiative and mapped how the technology will impact the future operating model of the organization, a concerted effort must occur to define and understand the overall complexity inherent in implementing the technology.

Factors impacting the implementation complexity can include everything from differing regulatory environments across geographies to the level of process change and the degree of cultural change inherent in adopting the new technology. Leaders will need to grasp the scope of complexity across people, processes, regulatory environments, and cultures to determine the overall risk associated with the pending implementation. Once the implementation’s complexity is adequately understood, steps can be taken to strategically mitigate risk and accelerate the technology’s adoption.

4. Prioritize Planning to De-Risk Implementation:

Complexity is not tamed in a day. Extensive planning is critical to map out all elements of the technology implementation, from target-state architecture, integration with surrounding systems, mapping and migration of data from legacy systems, and effective training development and deployment. Granular planning will ultimately accelerate and de-risk implementation.

Implementation planning provides leaders with the opportunity to slow down before accelerating. For example, many organizations pursue an incremental or phased approach to implementation upon fully assessing the magnitude of change caused by the selected technology. This allows organizations to capture critical lessons learned. Phased implementations require careful planning, but they ultimately de-risk implementation by reducing overall complexity.

Additionally, leaders have the opportunity to engage on-the-ground managers and users in these planning efforts, creating an additional layer of technology advocates while simultaneously gaining key operational insights necessary to ease the technology’s implementation and long-term adoption.
5. **Leverage Critical Talent to Accelerate Implementation:**

Successful technology implementations require dedicated, talented resources. Yet organizations are often reluctant to leverage top performers in the effort. Considering the degree of complexity, level of risk, and documented failure rate of these implementations, however, it is both recommended and appropriate to consider strategies for leveraging key talent across the life of the initiative.

Often, functional managers will be more open to committing key resources when they are able to shift mindsets and focus on the overarching strategic value of the implementation for the business. Organizational leadership should continually communicate the value and impact of the technology across functions, focusing on cascading alignment to increase receptiveness and commitment to success.

Alternately, if an organization is not positioned to leverage key internal talent, resources can be augmented with third-party expertise. Third-party partners can ramp up the implementation effort in a “just in time” manner, leveraging implementation experience and technology expertise to drive success. These partners should augment both the organization and the technology vendor, acting as an effective translator for both business requirements and technology parameters.

6. **Understand Culture, Educate Teams, and Prepare Organization for Adoption:**

No matter how effective the technology solution, and no matter how attractive the value proposition for the organization, if the people getting the job done are experiencing change fatigue, the implementation will slow, stall, and exhaust the organization before it ever goes live.

To mitigate change fatigue and increase overall adoption, leaders must make an honest assessment of their organization’s current state maturity and response to change. For example, if teams are set in their ways and fearful, leaders must recognize and understand how to subsequently set the pace for the technology implementation and corresponding change. Different organizations, and even different functional teams within organizations, will accept change at different rates.

Leaders can accelerate change agility, and simultaneously reduce change fatigue, by transparently communicating with their teams and educating them on the value and opportunities inherent in the technology. In addition to educating teams, leaders can prepare the organization for adoption by recognizing and rewarding changing behaviors and commitments to leveraging the technology effectively. Organizations can use key performance indicators via the technology itself to drive adoption and measure success (e.g., user/usage statistics and reduced process lag time). Successful adoption will accelerate the value created by the technology, capturing the return on investment promised by the solution.
CONCLUSION

Leveraging a proven technology solution can provide growing organizations with the tool set and platform necessary to execute more effectively and innovatively. Technology creates substantial value for customers and captures more value for the firm. Though technology implementations are high-risk, successfully utilizing leading practices to drive strategic, successful implementation will prepare organizations to capture return on investment rapidly while accelerating adoption and organization-wide success.

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