

5 TIPS

by Fred Ode

TO AVOID END-USER REJECTION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

Too many good technology applications have failed because of sabotage by users who want to stay with the status quo. Managing the natural resistance to change and helping employees accept new technology must be a planned process. With a little bit of effort and cooperation, contractors can turn deal-breaking end-user rejection into widespread commitment and enthusiasm.

New technology is often seen as a miracle fix that will automatically lead to faster, more efficient, and more profitable results. However, as many contractors discover, the wrong technology decision or a decision made without end users in mind can have the opposite effect.

Implementing a new technology initiative is never easy. It takes a lot of planning and decision-making and, above all, cooperation. Despite a new product's potential for boosting productivity and efficiency, it is often the end users of the system who pose the largest threat to its success. Six months to a year after introducing a new technology, companies often find that many employees (if not most) have reverted back to old software, spreadsheets and so on.

Why does this happen? Companies tend to forget that people are the key ingredient to their operations. What makes a company work is people, processes and technology. You simply cannot change the last ingredient without giving thought to the other two.

Basically, how a company manages change — not how it implements new technology — will

determine the outcome of new initiatives. Most business people agree the greatest challenges to new technology success are usually more behavioral than technical.

Following are five tips to avoid end-user rejection of new technology implementation:

TIP #1

Manage Change from the Top

Rather than reacting to change, managers and owners need to be proactive, using technology to accelerate their strengths for a competitive advantage. Creating change, therefore, starts with creating a vision for change and then empowering employees to attain that vision.

When considering new technology, managers and department heads should be involved in the planning phase to provide practical input and show that the entire organization is on board. Many owners remove themselves from the equation, which is a huge mistake. Their involvement will ensure the product not only meets specific objectives but also stays in line with the company's overall goals and long-term plans.

TIP #2

Understand Change Resistance

According to some major research studies, people fall into definite groups when it comes to accepting change. Only two to three percent of the average workforce can be classified as **innovators**, people who constantly look for new ways to do things. About 13 percent are defined as **early adopters** of new technology. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, 30 percent of employees are **late adopters**, people who resist change until pressured by co-workers or circumstances. A full 16 percent are **laggards**, people who cling rigidly to past traditions regarding how work should be done.

Considering that nearly half of all workers are opposed to change in the workplace, it's no wonder that implementing new technologies is such a hard accomplishment. The key is to identify innovators and early adopters and get them involved in the training process, so they can help excite and educate other users.

TIP #3

Make Employees Part of the Process

Another step to a successful transition is to include end users and all involved employees in the planning phase. And that means absolutely everyone. Not only does participation go a long way in alleviating tension and fears, but it also provides important information and feedback.

In many cases, employees will think of things, like processes or must-have features, that were never even considered. Most importantly, once employees learn how the new technology will benefit the company overall and how it will help them improve their own efficiency (and maybe even increase job satisfaction), they will be less resistant to change.

TIP #4

Consider Employees' Tech Skills

Before implementing any new technology, take into consideration the ability and skill level of all end users. Often, it may be necessary to devote some time to upgrading employees' skills, especially for people who are not familiar with certain technologies, in order to lower their anxiety levels and resistance.

Sometimes, it may become necessary to reposition people within the company. Just as it's unfair to ask an employee with no skills or training to tackle a job that builds on those skills, it may benefit the company to hire someone more qualified in that area or reassign job responsibilities.

TIP #5

Provide Appropriate Training

Finally, critical to the success of any new technology project is thorough and ongoing user training. People process information and learn differently. Therefore the range of training tools and the frequency of availability of those tools are key factors to success. For example, once the initial training is completed, will employees have access to resources and "tech help" when they are back at their desk and on their own? Will they be offered ongoing training to build on basic skills?

In addition to training employees on how to use the system, companies also need to talk about why the change is necessary. When information is shared about key benefits (faster processing time, better reporting, less keystrokes, etc.), users will accept the change in a positive way and with less resistance. ☺

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