

Ten common software implementation mistakes – avoid lost profits, time delays and disgruntled clients.

In a minor way, it can be embarrassing to make mistakes on software implementations.

For example, if you get the timing of a client site meeting wrong or something obvious does not work during client testing. These things are difficult but retrievable, if you have a good and trusting relationship with your client.



But other mistakes can have serious consequences. They can tarnish your reputation, upset clients and even lead to lost revenue.

In this article we will look at 10 common implementation mistakes, and we'll discuss what you can do to avoid them.

Mistake 1: Lack of Detailed Requirements Specification

There are many surveys published that show inadequate documentation of functional needs and requirements account for nearly 60% of ERP implementation failures. This can occur very early on in the selection process when senior managers have not looked at requirements and just focused on 'implementing a new system'. Whilst your client may not have gone through this process thoroughly, as software provider, you should.

Mistake 2: Not Allocating the Right Amount and Type of Resource to the Project

The importance of any software implementation should not be underestimated. How your implementation team interact with your client and the decisions they make, directly influence the projects success or otherwise.

Some companies allocate the sales team or more junior members to the project, but this creates problems of vision and understanding. These people may not have the required understanding of the client's strategic goals or business processes. Choose middle managers that are key users of the software and have extensive knowledge of company strategy and detailed processes. Empower the project team to make decisions on the implementation, workflows and processes used. Allow enough time for the project team to work on the implementation.

Mistake 3: Failure to Review Previous Project Performance

No matter how well a past project was deemed to have gone, there are always lessons to learn and better practice that can be used. Failing to conduct post project reviews mean that you will make the same mistakes that you made last time, hit on the same issues and never improve.



If you never improve, you will never increase your position and reputation in the marketplace. And from a management perspective, repeated mistakes will be costing you time and money. Review past projects to understand what went well and what needs to be improved upon for this project.

Mistake 4: Underestimating the Complexity and Amount of Time the Implementation will take

This area should be given real importance before the project is even started. It should not be a guess based on a memory of how long the last project took! This is where post project review is helpful to understand exactly what can happen, what may happen and what did happen, in order to arrive at a more accurate timescale. Companies who treat this as an estimating game are doomed to failure and client frustration.

Mistake 5: Biting off More Than you Can Chew

Trying to implement too much in terms of location or sites all at the same time, which proves too much for the client to handle. Another failure is to try and implement too many organisational changes to process at one time. Whilst these may end up being beneficial best practice, it may be too much for the workforce to handle.

Engage with the client to see whether or not adding various elements of new functionality creates too great a burden. Consider making some changes to process after an initial stabilisation period, but either way, discuss this in advance of changes being made.

Mistake 6: Lack of Communication

This can happen without even realising it and is the consequence of failing to share the project rationale, failure to update all parties adequately on progress or problems and failure to deal with change requests correctly. Poor communications prevent the different parts of the clients business from assessing the impact of change to processes, policies and procedures. Ensure you have a communications plan with accountabilities and responsibilities of who will communicate what and to whom.

Mistake 7: Replicating the Legacy System on New Software

Whilst some clients can be a little resistant to change, it is not wise to continue with the same processes and procedures that have been in place previously. This is an opportunity to add value and ensure that the client's new system streamlines processes for good reason and makes everything easier. It may take a little work to bring the client along, but this should not be ignored or the implementation may result in little overall change for the client and organisation.

The project team should understand the current processes and how the client's current system is being used. Also ask what the underlying reasons are for each process to ensure it is necessary and determine the business need that the process is fulfilling.

Mistake 8: Not Determining the Measure of Success with the Client

The decision to invest will have been born from the need to be faster, improve quality or produce more. But the reality is that companies get distracted with whether teams are adopting the process or not and specific methodologies.

Successful companies remain focused on the outcome for the clients and their business. They introduce practices and techniques to improve on overall outcomes and measure success against these outcomes. This enables them to be far better focused on the idea of continuous improvement.

Mistake 9: Not Considering Murphy's Law

If something is going to go wrong, it usually will. As part of the project planning process, include a risk assessment. What happens if there's a power cut, reduced resource through illness, a critical member of the team leaves or you hit resistance from the client? Brainstorm what could go wrong, and put in place plans to remove or reduce any risks you identify.

Mistake 10: Inadequate Training and Education

Users need time to adapt to change and even then, they will not all grasp it in the same timescales. Bringing people along on the route to change is essential as they are your 'loud speakers' for the effectiveness of your software.

Having a one-size fits all training package may not be relevant or appropriate when you think that the training is for senior directors through to warehouse operatives and marketing staff. This training should be ongoing and account for changes in staff over the years or the rot of not using the system correctly will soon set in amongst new employees.

