12 Tips for Implementing MS Project Server

The Microsoft Office Project Server EPM Solution provides organisations with the potential to communicate timely, relevant and up to date project information to users across all hierarchical levels, from Team Members at the base of the organization to Executives at the very top.

In addition to this facility, it also invests the organisation with the ability to report and analyse project and resource performance by innumerable criteria making project plans a powerful means to report key business critical information. This potential can be both a blessing and a curse to the project managers within an organisation.

On the positive side the projects function is likely to acquire a higher profile through the increased visibility of their projects within the organisation, on the negative side they will be more accountable and open to scrutiny than before.

Whilst the Microsoft Office Project Server EPM Solution offers these potential benefits, any organisation contemplating its adoption should be aware that it is not an instant fix and that in order for the initiative to take root and deliver the anticipated business benefits its adoption needs to be treated as a project in its own right.

Organisations that have leapt straight in and not invested time in preparing for the adoption of Microsoft Office Project Server have learnt some painful and expensive lessons and in some cases have failed to derive any business benefit at all from their investment in the solution.

To avoid you encountering the same problems should you be considering adopting the Microsoft Office Project Server EPM Solution the following have been identified as crucial Success Factors for an EPM deployment:

1. Develop a multidisciplinary team
2. Actively engage the organisation's executives
3. Develop a strong business case for the EPM Initiative
4. Allocate sufficient up-front time
5. Develop clear and complete business goals, requirements, and usage scenarios
6. Involve representatives from all user groups
7. Conduct a multi-staged rollout
8. Provide continuous communication
9. Test the installed hardware and software configuration
10. Prepare the users for the deployment
11. Train users at all experience levels –using customised instructions
12. Prepare to monitor the new environment

1. Developing a Multidisciplinary Team

This is important as the EPM Solution relies upon several different Microsoft technologies, Windows Server, SharePoint, SQL and Microsoft Office Project Serve r 2003 itself and it is unlikely that a

single individual will be expert in all or have experience of all areas. Microsoft Corporation does recommend that you engage the services of a qualified partner to assist in the implementation of the EPM Solution.

2. Actively Engage the Organisation's Executives

As the EPM initiative can represent a significant cultural change to the manner in which an organisation functions there needs to be high level support and involvement in the initiative from inception to completion. If team members at the base of the organisation do not see leadership by example there can be resistance to change. If an organisation has in the past introduced flawed or failing initiatives an expectation of further failure can prevail without adequate high level support and involvement.

3. Develop a Strong Business Case for the EPM Initiative

Assess your current situation and identify how the Microsoft Office Project Server EPM Solution can deliver real business benefits that will represent a good return on investment.

4. Allocate Sufficient Up -Front Time

Fail to plan, plan to fail –a bit clichéd but anyone with project experience will tell you that getting ready is the secret of success. Try to avoid being railroaded in to an implementation before the groundwork has been done.

5. Develop Clear and Complete Business Goals, Requirements, and Usage Scenarios

Having clear requirements and realistic expectations of the benefits to be derived from the adoption of an EPM Solution should help sell t he initiative to the organisation. If there are no clearly defined requirements and objectives the perceived success of the initiative may be open to interpretation.

6. Involve Representatives From all User Groups

Engaging the various types of user from t he outset will hopefully promote a sense of involvement and engagement in the initiative –alerting users to the new way of working posed by the EPM Solution, gaining their input and providing support should engender their support. Failing to engage those w ho are impacted by the solution can result in resistance to and in some cases a determination to see the initiative fail.

7. Conduct a Multi-Staged Rollout

Big Bang may have worked for the City of London but in most cases a more pragmatic approach will pa y dividends. Consider evolution rather than revolution.

8. Provide continuous communication

Communication is the very life blood of successful projects –planning for the communication of how your EPM implementation is progressing should engage the user ba se and prepare users for its adoption.

9. Test the Installed Hardware and Software Configuration

It may sound obvious but there have been instances where a flawed instance of Microsoft Office Project Server has been introduced and then failed to deliver. Again an experienced partner will know what to look for and how to test so that your instance of Microsoft Office Project Server can be proven to be configured to the required standard.

10. Prepare the Users for the Deployment

In addition to communicating with and engaging the user base providing training and support will further underpin your chances of success –communicating to them what training and support will be provided can help allay any fears people may have about the impact of the new initiative.

11. Train users at all Experience Levels –Using Customised Instructions

For the vast majority of users training of the full functionality of Microsoft Office Web Access (The client side of the solution) can be covered in half a day. For Project Managers familiar with Microsoft Project their training needs can in most cases be covered over a maximum of 2 days. Administrators or "Power Users" of the system will also need training on how to administer the system and configure the "Enterprise Layer" to delive r powerful business information.

12. Prepare to Monitor the New Environment

Once your instance of Microsoft Office Project Server is up and running there will be an element of IT Administration overhead in ensuring the health of the Server(s) and that the system is performing as expected without any problems. The Administrators will likely be provided with guidance on this during their training.

If you adopt the approach suggested here you can dramatically improve the chances of success for your Microsoft Office Project Server EPM implementation.