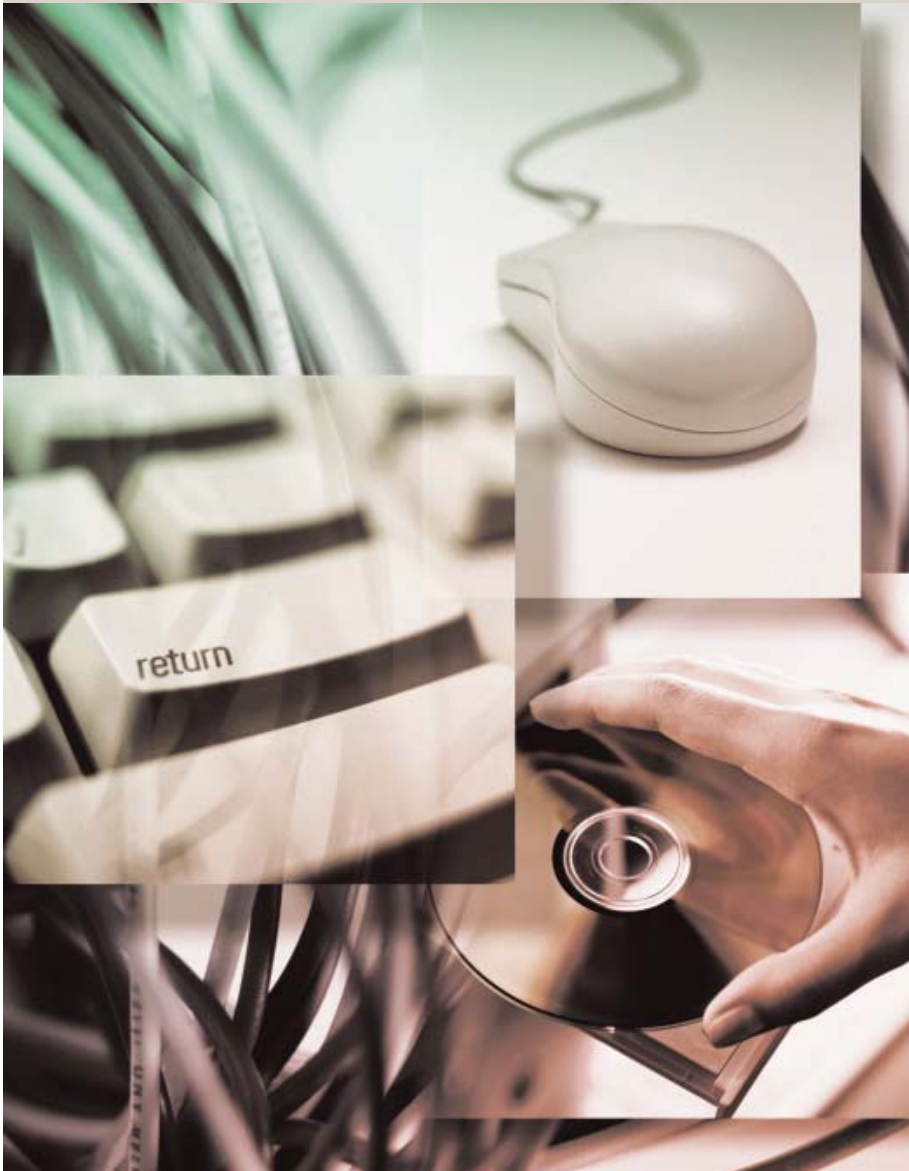


Software Selection Whitepapers

Software Selection Getting Started
Project Teams



BROWN
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GETTING STARTED PROJECT TEAMS

Executive Overview

The Successful Software Selection white paper series offers project teams the opportunity to garner consultant quality insight in manageable portions. Based on *The Software Selection Handbook*, the white paper series pares down selection project elements into subsets based on areas of interest. The series is ideal for committees just getting started on their selection project or teams well on their way to finding a new solution provider.

Getting Started: Project Teams reviews document organizational structure, creating teams, creating project plans, preparing orientation materials and kick-off meetings.

Introduction

Successful software selection – just thinking about the process is enough to make your head spin – so many steps to consider along the way, so much pressure to make the right choice.

Before you start thinking about vendors and software packages, features and costs, it pays to do your homework first. Realistically consider your resources and the time you have to complete the project. Spend extra time up front to document your goals and constraints. Select the right team and your project manager – include the people who are interested in the project and who will do what it takes to get it done – right. Establish a workable project plan with real target dates.

Most importantly, celebrate your large and small successes throughout the process. Publicly thank your team for meeting deadlines and doing a good job, let everyone know you appreciate the extra work this involves. Take the time to brief your employees along the way; nothing will help the project work more smoothly than a no-surprise environment.

Gradually you will work your way through the steps for successful software selection and avoid a six-figure mistake by getting it right the first time.

Getting Started

It is easy to ignore your computer system – until something goes wrong. Sometimes disasters allow us the opportunity to step back and see where you are; find out what your competitors are doing and learn what is available. Maybe you've narrowly avoided disaster or are frustrated with the inefficiencies of your current system, what's most important to remember is that business software decisions are an ongoing project, not a one-time event.

Document Organizational Structure

A good understanding of the organizational structure is needed to select the best software system. It is important that the people side of the business be understood. Selection processes that ignore the human elements are doomed to failure.

An accurate organization chart makes it easier for the vendors to do their discovery research. They need to verify that their software matches with your departmental requirements. It becomes a checklist so no one is left out.

Documenting the organization will help you identify potential staff to be interviewed. The exercise will put you in a better position to select the best individuals to be in charge of the evaluation process for each business segment.

Projects can get "bogged down" when a key individual in the process is inadvertently overlooked. The fall out will affect their support of the project. Whole departments have been known to cause problems in support of their favorite manager or supervisor.

A current organizational chart will also provide a basis for selecting your Project Team. Every area of the company must be covered, and every group must be represented. A current organization chart will help you do that early in the process.

Often we suggest that you create a second chart showing informal reporting relationships. These can be most important during the implementation process. It will help with short and long term planning for the entire project.

For each position, provide a short description of their duties and responsibilities. For management level personnel, add a description of their authority and capabilities. Where necessary identify personalities that will affect the project, both good and bad! For example, if you identify an individual who you believe will not accept the project willingly, and they are in a position to influence others, it might be a good idea to put them on the Project Team, or at least make them a representative from their area. Once they realize their input is valued, they might just become one of the projects biggest supporters.

This level of detail is most necessary in larger organizations where some of the team members do not work with other on a regular basis. It provides a common ground to understand each other's positions and requirements.

Create Teams

Properly completed, the work associated with selecting a business software system will have many benefits to the enterprise. This is regardless of the size of the organization. The following discussion will mean different things to different size operations. For smaller companies, it will seem like overkill to even have more than one group that does everything. Use your judgment and fit the needs to your size organization and understand the concepts involved. This will enable you to lead your organization to a successful selection and implementation.

As noted earlier, a project of this magnitude will impact every area of your organization. Coordinating the activities across the firm must be done from the top down.

Without commitment and involvement from top management, a project such as this cannot succeed. This is extremely important. Top management must support the project if it is to be successful. As the project proceeds, decisions must be made and actions taken which will affect the organization for years to come. These decisions can only be made with the approval and input of top management.

Managing the process may involve two new groups and one new position. The size of your organization and the complexity of the functions will determine how large a team is actually necessary. However, the descriptions of the tasks to be completed are the same no matter what size organization, and the number of people involved may be as few as one in a smaller company.

The first necessity is a Project Manager (PM). In larger organizations, this may become a full-time position during the length of the project. The Project Manager will be responsible for coordinating all of the activities associated with the project. He or she will report to the Management Steering Committee and chair the Project Team.

A management level Steering Committee is needed to function as a sounding board and central decision-making council. This group represents the interest of top management and the ownership of the firm. The Project Team will represent all areas of the company and will be responsible for carrying out the plans approved by the Steering Committee. Detailed tasks will include everything related to the collecting, documenting, designing and implementing an information systems strategy.

Project Manager

The person in charge must be excited about the project and be able to generate enthusiasm among the team members. In family owned businesses, you should avoid the tendency to appoint a family member or owner just to give them something to do. That decision may cause the project to fail. Look for a volunteer. Look for someone who is trusted by top management and the ownership team.

This project will affect the long-term viability of the company. The right individual will have the ability to successfully control this process. The proper business software solution is integral to the total operation of a company today. Recognize the impact this project will have on everyone in your organization and everything it must accomplish to make your business successful or to stay successful.

Whoever is selected as Project Manager will have to be educated quickly. They must learn every operation of your organization, and must be able to communicate that to the software vendors. It will also be up to them to explain and guide key management members through technical decisions made by the Project Team. Often, a younger executive with computer skills is a good choice.

This person must also be able to deal with the top decision-makers in the company. When the project is completed, the Project Manager will be in a position to assume greater responsibility within the company. They will have just finished preparing the organization, both strategically and tactically, for a move into the future.

Project management skills are also a must in this position. If the best candidate is an unproven manager, teaming a younger owner/manager with a more seasoned one is a good combination. Most (if not all) other day-to-day duties should be removed from their plate. Managing and keeping the project on track will become a full time activity in all but the smallest companies.

Steering Committee

The Steering committee will assume the role of arbiter in all cases where tough decisions must be made. Steering committees are often made up of the owners and/or top managers of the business. Depending on the size of the company, this group will be as small as two individuals (the owner and the project manager) or as large as six to eight. Larger groups tend to become deadlocked when decisions are required and are not recommended in most situations.

In a larger company, the Steering Committee will normally include the chief executive, operating, and financial officers. A representative of the Board of Directors is a good idea as it will keep that group informed of the projects status. A representative of the Information Management organization is important, while someone from Personnel can be advantageous.

Steering Committee members will be required to review all project reports on a monthly or every other week basis at the start of the project. As the conclusion draws nearer, more frequent meetings may be required

If the project will be affected by politics or there are contentious problems to be solved, someone on the Steering Committee must have final authority and be able to make decisions that will be accepted by the rest of the team. If this is not done, the whole project may be in jeopardy.

Project Team

As noted, the Project Team should represent all areas of the organization. Again, in a small company, this may be only one or two people. At a minimum, consider having someone who can represent the following areas of the company (of course if you do not have that function, leave it out – but do add any mission critical functions to the list):

Distribution Solutions:

- Accounting/finance
- Personnel/payroll
- Inventory control/warehouse
- Shipping/receiving
- Purchasing
- Sales/marketing
- Customer Service
- Field Service
- Rental / Repair
- Information technology

For manufacturing add:

- Shop floor
- Production control
- Quality assurance
- Research and development

For A Service Oriented Business Consider:

- Time & Billing
- Project Management

A key requirement of each representative is that they should be knowledgeable about their areas. Sending a fairly new person to the team, since they may have less to do, is a very bad idea. Each person needs to have a back-up so that progress is never delayed because one person is unavailable.

These individuals will have to commit to allocating time for information collection and analysis. They will also provide a link between their workgroup and the project. It will be their responsibility to report back to their area what is happening and in return bring ideas, concerns and issues from their area to the Project Team.

The success of this type of project depends on the ability to communicate between the various departments or groups within your organization. Addressing software or technology issues may force you to remove barriers that may have long existed between various areas. As a result, establishing clear communication early is very critical.

Regular meetings of the Project Team will be established. These are not to be missed. Following each meeting, minutes are to be distributed which highlight the progress made, resolution of any problems, new difficulties, and assignments for the next meeting. The results of the meetings should be reviewed by the Steering Committee. In larger companies, top management will meet with the Steering Committee on an as-needed basis.

It is important to keep everyone posted on the progress of the overall project, as well as any activities that will affect their area. Plan on a no-surprise environment. This will minimize many people problems and procedural issues which are sure to arise.

Time Commitments

In making assignments, be aware (and make sure your selected members are aware) of the time commitments that will be required. While none of the team members other than the Project Manager will be close to full time, providing a realistic estimate of the time expected will eliminate later problems.

As the project progresses, there will be the need for more frequent meetings. It may also be necessary to have special meetings to resolve issues and make key decisions. Early in the project, the Steering Committee members may need to allocate only about five percent of their time to it. It is not unusual for that allotment to grow to ten to fifteen percent as the project nears the final decision point, and during implementation.

Project Team members' time will be more difficult to estimate. It will depend on the needs of their area, and the size and the complexity of that areas processing. For the most part, an estimate of ten percent is reasonable for most of the project. This time may be increased where additional research is required to identify the specific requirements of an area.

In unusual situations, the time may be extended to as much as 25 percent. In addition, a Project Team will also be required during the implementation of the new system. It is not necessary to maintain the same team members for this major activity, but key individuals will be needed for the entire project from beginning to end.

Project Team members need to accept the invitation to be part of the Team willingly. Their efforts will be appreciated, but may overwhelm some members of the staff. If they are not comfortable, do not add them to the Team. It is very important that everyone participating in the effort be there because they want to be there and understand how they are contributing to the future of the organization. Anything less, will invite problems.

Create Project Plan: Responsibilities and Target Dates

The Steering Committee and the Project Manager (PM) kick off the planning process. The Project Manager begins by reviewing all possible tasks and recommending to the Steering Committee those that are appropriate for the organization. The PM must consider the constraints of time, money and resources available.

Once approved, the Committee and Project Manager will select individual Project Team members and make preliminary task assignments. In addition, preliminary responsibilities and budgets will be set.

Each of the tasks to be completed will need to have a Champion. This Project Team member will report to the Project Manager to make sure the task is done. In many of the early data collection tasks, representatives from each affected area will have to work together to gather, organize and document all of the required information. In larger organizations, an overall Champion may be needed to support the Project Manager.

During the Kick-Off Meeting (Section 1.9), the Project Manager will describe the overall plan and objectives. They will discuss the expected time frames and how individual target dates will be set. The Steering Committee will have already created a calendar that works around known problems and schedules. It is now up to the Project Manager and the Project Team to fill in the blanks and report back to the Steering Committee as to the accepted project plan.

An important aspect will be to let each person set their own target dates, within reason. It is imperative that your people are committed to getting the project done. If they believe that they are just so many cogs in a wheel, deadlines will tend to float and the work will never get completed.

The Project Manager will have to stay in touch with the Champions on a regular basis. Many projects get into trouble because the tasks are defined so large that they become overwhelming. Attempt to define subtasks that can be completed in one week or less. This is a short enough time that an average individual can get their hands around an issue and the amount of effort that will be required. As the team gets used to succeeding at this type of project, the time frames may be extended. However, it is best to keep any individual task to under four weeks duration.

Use the targets and resource requests from the Champions to update the Steering Committee's initial project budget. You may be surprised at what it will cost. Do not hide the total numbers. It is important that everyone understand how large this project might be and the impact it can have on the company. Plus, if you are unrealistic at the start of the project, the potential for failure increases.

Prepare from the start to accurately track and report progress against the plan. Remember, estimates are just that – estimates. Changes to the work definitions, unforeseen situations and many other "Murphy Laws" developments will affect the final time and cost. Keep your plans up-to-date and record all changes. From a management viewpoint, keep a copy of all of the original estimates so you can understand how the scope of this type of project can change.

Once the Steering Committee approves the plan, it will be useful to take one more step. Top management and/or ownership should review and approve the proposed budget and plans. They must be committed to the process and fully understand the costs and timeframes involved.

Publish the plan for the whole company to see. Include the budget for the Steering Committee and Project Team as appropriate. As noted previously, Steering Committee meetings should be scheduled on a regular basis to make sure everyone is making the appropriate progress. Review all progress. Review all charges against the budget. Review and approve all changes. Review everything!

Then, celebrate the success of your team members in public. Help each person to be successful. Do not allow anyone to fall so far behind that they will jeopardize the project.

Prepare Orientation Materials

Orientation materials are the first communication from the Steering Committee to the Project Team and general staff. It is very important that these documents accomplish their required results:

- To inform the employees of the nature of the project
- To establish a "no surprise" environment (we want everyone to know what is going on)
- To introduce the Steering Committee and Project Team
- To explain the reporting structure so everyone will know they are represented and who to go to with questions or ideas
- To manage expectations – paint a realistic picture of what will occur and its impact

The documentation needs to be short and simple. Everyone should be able to read and understand what is going to happen from a high level perspective. They need to feel part of the project and believe that their input and efforts will be critical to the overall success of the endeavor.

For those who will have a more direct role, there needs to be additional documentation to help them prepare for and participate in the project. This will help you make the most effective use of a participant's time. At a minimum, the package needs to contain:

An overview of the project

This short (one or two page) write up should describe the reasons for the undertaking and the expected results. It needs to describe the structure of the teams and identify the Project Team members and the respective areas they are representing. Include the names of all staff being interviewed as part of the data gathering process.

Project Schedule And Plan

Include a copy of the plan that was created in the last step. This will provide everyone with the necessary time lines and some idea of when the project may affect their areas.

Project Team Responsibilities

In a one-page document, provide an explanation of their responsibilities for the project. Impress on them the importance of keeping all personnel in their area informed as to the projects progress. Encourage them to have ad hoc meetings to solicit input and ideas for improvements in the operation from the staff.

What To Expect During The Interview

This will only go to those staff that will participate in the interviews. The document will describe the interview process. It will review the overall objective of the interview and the specific (if any) inputs an individual is expected to provide. There will be a checklist to assist them in planning for the interview. In some cases, there may be team or department interviews. A separate document will be needed for anyone participating in that environment.

A Preliminary Schedule For The Interviews

This preliminary schedule of when the interviews will take place provides an advance warning for each area. They should plan to prepare their representative with ideas and concerns to take to the interview. Following the Kick-Off Meeting, the schedule should be finalized. Take into account any known conflicts and travel schedules. As much as possible, all interviews should be scheduled around the same time period.

Kick-Off Meeting

The Steering Committee prepares and presents this meeting. In large companies, only the Project Team and those individuals identified as participating in the interviews are invited. A company-wide meeting is better where the size of the organization will permit it to occur. A meeting summary by email and a project newsletter can be used in larger organizations to communicate the importance of the project and its expected effect on the whole business.

All of the orientation material will be reviewed and explained. The overall schedule needs to be explained. Tell the group how it will be tracked and that there will likely be changes. Any project of this magnitude will require input from everyone. Encourage their support of the process.

Use this opportunity to introduce any significant target dates. If it is necessary to have the selection project completed and implemented by the start of the next fiscal year, let the group know. Ask for their help to make the date. Get buy-in early!

Distribute and discuss the project plan, schedule, and responsibilities. Where time permits, allow each of the Steering Committee members and Champions a chance to address the group. Ask them to explain their project responsibilities.

The Project Team members need to be given some time to review the target dates (preferably as part of the meeting) so the Steering Committee can be made aware of any changes that will be required to the schedule. Then ask each of them to identify a back up person in their group who will be available in any case where they cannot make a meeting or respond to a project request.

Always provide time for questions and answers. Appoint a recorder for the meeting and publish the notes as soon after the meeting as possible. These notes should include any changes to the schedule or project personnel.

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About *The Software Selection Handbook*

Developed at the request of our clients who recognize the methodology we have developed over the past 20 years as the best in the business, *the Software Selection Handbook* details the same process employed by our consultants for client engagements to help you tackle the difficult task of finding the right software for your business. Multiple copy discounts are available.

The Software Selection Handbook includes an electronic version of every form on CD and provided in electronic format at no additional charge. The forms, supported on any Windows PC platform, are available as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel and Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format files.

The Software Selection Handbook was created as a guide for organizations interested in reviewing and selecting new software and technology through the use of a well-structured process. The authors, publishers and distributors do not make any representation or warranty as to the suitability of the following information for a specific business or business purpose. It is up to each organization to assess their situation and take the appropriate action.

To order visit:

http://www.software4distributors.com/resource/software_selection_handbook.aspx
or contact Cory Metz at 314.983.1216 or via email cmetz@bswllc.com

About Brown Smith Wallace Consulting Group

St. Louis based Brown Smith Wallace Consulting Group, founded in 1976, is a leader in the strategic use of technology to create competitive advantage. While other firms may bring answers based on their experience, we use our experience to help our clients find the unique answers to their unique situations. For more information visit www.software4distributors.com.

Brown Smith Wallace, which has revenue of \$13 million, is the second largest locally owned independent full-service CPA and business consulting firm in Missouri. Brown Smith Wallace, with offices in St. Louis, St. Charles and Chicago, makes a measurable difference in clients' lives by making sure clients get more than just a good return on their investment, finding hidden value, looking where others forget, bridging gaps to form long lasting relationships, being accessible and by putting a guarantee in writing. For more information visit www.bsllc.com or call 314.983.1200.

Additional Resources:

- Distribution Software Guide
http://www.software4distributors.com/resource/distribution_software_guide.aspx
- Successful Software Selection -- Getting Started: Project Management (White Paper)
- Successful Software Selection -- Getting Started: Documenting Where We Are
- Successful Software Selection -- Vendor Selection: RFPs and Reference Checks (White Paper)
- Successful Software Selection -- Vendor Selection: Demonstration Planning (White Paper)
- Successful Software Selection -- Vendor Selection: Contract Negotiations (White Paper)