

Simply the Best (ERP project team members)

Who should you put on your ERP Project Team? This is my personal view of who you shouldn't.

When I first started writing this article it was meant to be a short piece for my blog at www.neustro.vox.com . However, as I settled into my subject and recalled my experiences it became clear to me that it was going to be too long for a blog entry, I had, as many people have already observed, plenty to say. So here goes....

If you are about to launch into a major ERP implementation project you will be in the process of selecting your internal project team. I have, over the years, worked with great project teams, average project teams and some which to begin with, were simply awful. When deciding who to put on an implementation team there is a tension between keeping your best people for the business today, and committing them to a project where you may not realise the benefits for 6 months or maybe a year.

The worst....

I'll talk about how you define 'best' a little later, but in the meantime I'll deal with the possible candidates that can be the worst. This is clearly my view and individuals who fit into the categories below won't necessarily make poor candidates for your project team.

The 'I can't afford to make them redundant' candidate: This is the person who has been around the business for a long time, knows his or her part of it very well, has very set opinions and is simply too expensive to make redundant. The department head has been trying to get rid of this person for ages but can't take the hit of redundancy in their budget – so he 'volunteers' the candidate because it solves several problems. However, the project team will recognise this and resent them and this will cause problems within your project.

The 'I don't know what to do with this person' candidate: Typically this is a person bought in on the fledgling 'Graduate Recruitment Program' (GRP). The program went as far as the idea that it was a good idea – no thought however was put into a formal training regime for the graduate. It's a relief when the department head gets this person from under their feet and off their budget. This person doesn't really know your business well and probably won't have pragmatic experience of business generally. They won't be able to map the ERP software to your real world.

The ‘Awkward Squad’ candidate: This is the person that you know knows their stuff and is highly competent but just doesn’t get on with anybody. They are the sort of person that can annoy you and your colleagues by just walking into the room. He has had an argument with almost everybody in the business and assumes that nobody else knows what they are doing. The chances are that he won’t be the most productive team member in terms of project team cohesion.

The ‘This person is threatening to leave so I’ll keep them by putting them on this project’ candidate: It seems like a good idea. He’s been into your office and told you he’s leaving and you’ve realised he is so important you will do anything (almost including a whopping pay rise) to keep him. You then think that this is the project for him. Well, it may just be the right challenge and he may make a great project team member. But if he doesn’t have an aptitude for understanding ERP and what it means you potentially end up losing the experience you wanted to retain in the current business to the project and him turning round at some point in the project and leaving anyway. The chances are he’s good and someone wants to employ him and his shown already that he’s not afraid to leave. Putting him on the project may just be a delaying tactic. Think about it carefully.

The ‘Not competent at the job they are currently doing’ candidate: To propose this person, along with the ‘can’t afford redundancy’ and ‘awkward squad’ candidates, simply shows that the business doesn’t have strong management and/or appropriate appraisal and disciplinary procedures. It’s a cop out for the manager involved to try and shift this person to the project team. If the person hasn’t demonstrated full competence over their current role then there’s no proof that they will to their new role – and this could lead to failure of your project.

The ‘9 to 5’ candidate: This is a tough one. In the USA they call pay ‘compensation’. To my mind I think the term is correct – the business is compensating the employee for their time. Why should anybody give more than they are compensated for? Actually I agree with this and for some roles it’s perfect – you know you can rely on them. For some people it displays a ‘work to live’ ethic and that’s OK. What you really need though for this type of project are people that are going to be flexible and committed to a tough schedule and will be (almost) happy to change their working hours to suit the demands of the project. If you are considering putting a person like this onto the project ensure that they understand what is required because if it’s not explicitly stated they will carry on with their 9 to 5 attitude and this will annoy the rest of the project team.

The ‘I’ve never used a computer before’ candidate: It pains me to say it but I have come across this happening before. The person was all at sea and deeply uncomfortable with the project and eventually went on long term sick leave. Although ERP isn’t about IT, you have to use IT to use it.

The ‘Overly shy’ candidate: Some people can be very highly competent and completely shy. They are often great employees but it’s often unfair, without proper coaching and mentoring, to throw them onto a project like this. They will need to meet with many people across the business and challenge orthodoxies in the way things are done. They will also have to present their proposals and train the end users in a classroom environment. It can either be a life changing event that gives someone great confidence or it can be hell on earth.

And the best?

Well, frankly, just not the 'worst'. And people who in your absolutely honest judgement will be good project team members. Of course they need to understand your business and hopefully will have had broad exposure to your processes.

It is likely that removing them from the 'business' will meet with howls of protest as they are considered to be vital to the day-to-day management of the company. Remind everybody that this is part of an important investment in the future of your business and that these people will make sure that your future business system is the best it can be.

Good luck!

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About the Author: Martin has worked as an IT consultant for Deloitte and Touche and also as the European IT Director for Mondi Packaging, a division of the FTSE listed company, Anglo American. He has overseen both growth and downsizing of large IT departments and managed IT outsourcing arrangements.

About Neustro: Neustro are the business systems experts - design, implement, manage and support IT for business – from e-mail to ERP. From one-off projects to a complete outsourced service. Neustro are specialists in Microsoft Dynamics AX and Infor Baan.

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