



Lessons Learned in Project Transition

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Background

- RTI won a contract from a long standing incumbent
- Incumbent's contract did not include a transition task
- Contractual requirement was to use existing systems
- Existing systems were legacy systems
 - Little to no documentation was available or provided
- We needed to get an old legacy data entry application running in our computing environment in a short time

Incumbent is less than helpful

- Problems

- The incumbent's contract had no transition task, so they had no transition plan
- This incumbent was reluctant and sluggish with communication
- Documents and systems were not made available on the agreed upon schedule

- Solutions

- Keep the client in the loop to encourage better responses from the incumbent and to make the client aware of delays
- Plan for a larger number of tech staff working over a shorter time period to get things running after initial delays

Undocumented legacy system must be used

- **Problems**

- Incumbent systems were written in 1990's and had not been updated
- No documentation was available for the systems

- **Solutions**

- Technical support team had prior experience with the antiquated technology
- We obtained assistance from staff not directly assigned to the project as needed
- We generated our own data dictionary starting with the data tables in the ACCESS 97 database and mapping that to the data forms

Undocumented legacy system must be used (continued)

- Problems

- No documentation on correct configuration or use of the data entry application

- Solutions

- Data entry staff entered forms and worked with tech staff to verify that data was correctly recorded. We discovered several quirks of the application by thoroughly testing it this way.
- One of the tech staff spent time verifying the data dictionary using a “black box” approach
- Experimenting with different configurations and testing the system with multiple users allowed us to determine how to configure the application correctly.

Legacy system will not run on our standard computing platforms

- Problem
 - The data entry application would not run on our standard Windows 7 platform

- Solution
 - Technical team found old decommissioned PCs that would run the data entry application after installing VB 6 and ACCESS 97
 - Google search resolved a strange error that prevented the application from starting up properly on the old PCs

No training materials for data entry staff

- Problem
 - There were no training materials or other documentation on how to use the DE app
- Solutions
 - Closely examine and intimately understand data entry forms
 - Work closely with data entry staff
 - Be available to answer questions
 - Allow time for them to enter live forms on a test platform
 - Work with management to answer questions and develop your own internal QC processes
 - Generate and post Tip and How To Sheets for DE Staff
 - Identify a strong DE Leader

Data Entry application must work with QC application

- **Problem**

- Incumbent did not supply us with most current version of the QC program
- This produced unexpected results when data was delivered to client

- **Solution**

- If possible, verify that you have the correct version of each application.
- If you can't do this, it will cause problems and you will pay for it later

Data Entry application must work with QC application (continued)

- **Problem**
 - QC program provides cryptic error messages and there is no documentation of what these mean
- **Solution**
 - Hire someone who has worked with the QC application and understands the cryptic error messages

Updating/replacing the legacy system

- **Problem**

- The legacy system is hard to use
- It does not fit in with our standard DE practices
- It is expensive to use because it is not fully automated

- **Solutions**

- Offer the client an “updated version” of the DE application at a hard to resist price as a small contract add-on
- At this point the client realized that the application had some serious deficiencies and would need to be replaced soon anyway, so they accepted our offer
- The updated DE application is easy to use, does a better job of catching errors before the QC program is run, and eliminates the manual processing steps of the old application

Summary

These 3 practices/principles helped us solve almost all of the problems we encountered:

1. Maintain open and honest communication with the project managers at RTI and with the client about problems and delays
2. Take advantage of the expertise of staff in other divisions (and other companies)
3. Be willing to take a trial-and-error, experimentation approach to understanding a legacy application. This can be much faster than trying to understand large amounts of uncommented program code.

Questions



More Information

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