



Critical Elements of WMS and Labor Implementations

TIPS, CONSIDERATIONS & ALTERNATIVES FOR DECISION MAKERS

 **BlueYonder**
Selling Partner

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Introduction: The Human Factor

Having completed more than 700 warehouse and labor management system implementations since our founding, Open Sky Group has come to observe that the success of these projects is more about the people than it is about the software. How you build a team and what those team members do to prepare the rest of the organization for “life after go-live” is, indeed, the most critical element of the assignment.

The people leading the project, the people performing the installation and the people using the end product will determine not only the project’s ultimate time-to-value, they will also determine its long-term impact on the organization’s ongoing success.

This white paper explores the critical elements of warehouse management (WMS) and labor management (LMS) system implementations, from setting expectations to ensuring the final installation adds value to everyone’s day. Along the way, we will discuss such topics as planning and preparation, selecting the right team, initial kick-off, potential stumbling blocks, post-implementation best practices and how to communicate for effective change management throughout the project and beyond.

In the end, we hope to equip you with the right mindset and best practices to ensure a smooth transition to your new WMS and LMS environments, adding great satisfaction to the people who matter most: your workforce, stakeholders and customer base.

Preparing for Success

THE FOUNDATION FOR POST GO-LIVE SUCCESS

Projects can quickly derail unless stakeholders from every department are aware of what's happening, have a voice in the initial design and scope of the effort and understand what their various roles will be in achieving success.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

Most WMS/LMS projects begin with hope and promise, ripe with excitement and the expectation that the new system will make life better for everyone involved. However, to cobble those expectations into some semblance of reality, a good deal of clarifying discussion must occur up front.

Chief on the list of topics is setting a realistic timeline. Missed timelines cost money. Those precious timelines will likely be missed if the proper change management is not in place to keep everyone's expectations, responsibilities and reportage aligned within the realm of a realistic schedule.

For this reason, project leadership is essential. Certainly, your implementation project will need a champion to drive the effort from start to finish and keep everyone on track. But who is everyone?

Projects can quickly derail unless stakeholders from every department are aware of what's happening, have a voice in the initial design and scope of the effort and understand what their various roles will be in achieving success. This means starting from the top and working throughout the entire organization, involving C-level support, IT, user groups (such as warehouse and labor managers), as well as those who will be collaterally affected (such as sales and service personnel).



What you don't want is a project to go forward leaving folks in your warehouse or brick-and-mortar stores feeling inconvenienced or left out of the discussion. You certainly don't want your CEO having to write letters of apology afterwards to key customers who didn't see the change coming and must now adjust their interactions with your company to compensate for the change.

STRUCTURE THE EVENT AROUND KPIS

Use the implementation as a seminal event, wherein everyone understands that the change is imminent and that now is the time to voice any wants, needs, desires or concerns, so that the planners can accommodate. KPIs are a great way to define project goals and keep the work on point. Set them early using the best available input from your team. Be aware that your timeline and time itself may not always cooperate.

For instance, your go-live may be on the calendar for months and everyone is watching for the system to perform as expected. However, an unforeseen surge in week one throws the system into overload. Suddenly, you need to ship 200 cases per hour in a single day and no one accounted for the spike. Week two may be more

in line, but could you have planned better? What does your history tell you? Did anyone know such a surge was coming? What are in the bounds of reasonable activity for the season?

The truth is, you are probably not going to double your productivity right out of the gates, as the organization is still getting used to the new platform. Give your people some time to adjust to the new system. Allow space for the learning curve to even out. If you plan carefully up front, your team will be on the same page and able to prevent any negative events from impacting customers.

Take Away the Silos

WHO'S ON YOUR TEAM? WHAT DO YOU TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION?

WHO'S ON THE TEAM?

As discussions turn into plans, it is vitally important to have the right team assembled for the journey. Implementation projects are simply too broad for one or two “heroes in a closet” to accomplish. You will want to ensure that key players throughout the organization are engaged and empowered to guide the work along, hold key associates accountable and settle disputes where necessary. This will require a smart combination of ringers and rosters, players on the team, to balance the workload.

Ringers might include a lead partner from the software company side who knows how the application works and where to find a “fix” in times of need. A top IT executive who is familiar with the company infrastructure and how things work from a technical standpoint would also add value, as well as, perhaps, a long-time employee who has been through a few implementations or upgrades in the

past. Or a veteran consultant who can lend years of experience to the equation.

The rest of the team should represent various organizational interests, including top warehouse or labor executives whose output might be directly affected by the project, along with folks from operations, accounting, finance, sales and customer service. If various locations are involved, try to cover each location in the completion of your roster. It might also be wise to include some junior, up-and-comers on the list; those who stand to learn from the experience and can add value to your ranks well after the implementation is finished.

The idea is to take away the siloes and make sure everyone is on board with the event – and most importantly, all singing the same tune.



DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOUR WORK SITE

Another key area often overlooked in software implementations is the physical readiness of the targeted work site the new system will govern. A lot of coordination is involved in getting your software into production, and that includes making sure your warehouse layout is ready to accommodate any new workflows. Are all your racks in the right place? Are any new robots running as expected? Are your lines of communication established, and is everything sequenced on the floor to make that warehouse hum the minute the system goes live?

You want to be certain that what you planned for in the program actually plays out on the floor. You don't want to have to go back and make unnecessary changes in the program or delay the go-live because the logistics weren't planned properly up front.

AVOID THE TEMPTATION TO CUSTOMIZE

Whatever you do, resist the temptation to customize. Years ago, software implementations were all about customizing the program to fit certain organizational idiosyncrasies. It seemed everyone in the room had a secret sauce they wanted cooked into the system and software

developers were more than happy to accommodate. After all, writing code is what software developers do.

Bear in mind, writing code is expensive business and one little change here can make ten more changes necessary downstream. This may render the program unrecognizable to anyone attempting to "fix" a glitch several months down the road. Before long, you get a program that is completely out of warranty, incompatible with any future upgrades and obsolete well before its time.

Today's warehouse and labor management software is built on best practices, so make the most of that fact. Ask for a product demonstration. Then ask yourself, "Am I requiring this software to fix a process that didn't work properly in the first place, or can I make a minor adjustment and correct the flaw at its root?"



Can the base product be creatively adjusted to accommodate the request? Can you simply rename a few fields on the screen to achieve the same result? Or is there an extension already available that might provide the desired outcome?

It is important to leverage the base functionality as much as possible, especially if your organization is growing, or you anticipate opening a new distribution center soon. You'll want a software solution that can be lifted and shifted into the new place and work consistently with your brand on day one. Customization will preclude you from this kind of agility. Avoid coding yourself into a minefield of customized exceptions.

GETTING THE INTEGRATIONS RIGHT

While customizations are to be avoided at all cost, integrations are a fact of life in any new software implementation. No WMS or LMS runs in a vacuum; they must be enabled to communicate with other systems inside and outside the enterprise in order to function correctly.

Therefore, it is important to factor integrations into the implementation up front. Get your cross-functional team together to discuss what data will be required to feed into the system and where that data will be coming from to ensure a proper connection. Identify any related host or tenant systems, customer systems or reporting sys-

tems that will need to channel in. Factor these into your implementation design to ensure your project comes off without any undue surprises.

THE VALUE OF WORKING WITH AN AGILE SHOP

Open Sky Group manages projects using an agile methodology that emphasizes overlapping activities aimed at achieving quick wins on the way to completion. Compare this to the traditional waterfall method, which depends on one phase being fully complete before the next phase can begin.

An agile shop does not have to wait for the project to cascade in sequence, because the work is being done iteratively. That is, one configuration for receiving can be in production, while another for replenishment is in process at the exact same time. As these various configurations fall into place, users can be testing and approving them, or making corrections, without holding up other areas of the implementation. This is how we can spin up warehouses in a matter of weeks or months versus years. We proceed with agility. And, oh yes, we avoid customizations like the plague.

Life After Go-Live

YES, THERE IS LIFE AFTER THE BIG MOMENT

POST IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Once you launch, allow your team to settle in on the system and start to see results. Some of those results may call for change; this is to be expected. No matter how many user-acceptance tests you run, there will always be room for optimization.

Contrary to popular belief, change can often be a good thing. Processes that have become entrenched over the years may not always be the best way to get products out the door. In fact, “that’s the way we’ve always done it,” may be the first sign that something needs to change.

The question to ask is “why?” Why are things being done this way and why wouldn’t a change make sense?

Plan accordingly. Leave room for post-implementation tweaks on your overall timeline by extending it beyond the initial go-live phase. Ensure post-go-live resources remain available to address those tweaks, especially on LMS installations, which are generally living, breathing things. Changes in your labor force over-time tend to bring new issues to light. Plan for new opinions to enter the picture and reserve time and resources to address those items that deserve attention and consideration.

HOW YOU MANAGE CHANGE COUNTS

Contrary to popular belief, change can often be a good thing. Processes that have become entrenched over the years may not always be the best way to get products out the door. In fact, “that’s the way we’ve always done it,” may be the first sign that something needs to change.

Indeed, many entrenched processes were created in a silo, because no other outside contact forced a broader viewpoint. Adopting a new WMS or LMS will, by nature, expose these sticking points as opportunities, because suddenly, everything is on the table for consideration.

The question to ask is “why?” Why are things being done this way and why would a change not make sense? The explanation can be enlightening, so ask. The system – meaning both the software and processes it encompasses – could be perfect in theory. But without these valuable discussions, theory and reality will not match up.

Users should be engaged and empowered to weigh in early and often. Include them in the proof of concept stage. Go to the floor and give them a feel for the new tablets. Show them the new screens. Get their opinions and be open about it.

Consider all three categories of users to gain the broadest perspective:

1. those who will hear about the new software
2. those who will see it in action
3. those who will actually use it in practice.

For example, salespeople won't be using the screens, but they will be talking to customers about it, hearing their perceptions of it before and after the software goes in. Likewise, service reps, transportation folks and drivers may end up seeing the screens and need to know how to interpret the various information, even though they never engage the software in any physical way. And finally, the folks on the warehouse floor will be using the software daily and what they think must be factored in to make the entire project “stick.”

Bottom line: having an immersive, cross-user adoption experience will go a long way to managing the change to the betterment of all.

AND FINALLY, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Taking all this information into account, the one item that will lubricate the entire transformation process is clear; on-going, effective communications.

Open Sky Group maintains a full-time marketing team that specializes in developing and creating quality, internal communications materials to support our software implementations. We can work with you to identify your various internal audiences, engage them in the process, and solicit their input and buy-in to ensure that what's going on is understood and acceptable to each category of user.

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ule of emails, cards, posters, slide decks, etc. should be part of the overall transformation plan.

Further, as more logistics employees interface with technology on the job, legitimate fears of being replaced, as well as frustrations dealing with next-generation systems, add to a work-related stress situation that is not healthy for employees or the business. Simple ticks, such as added keystrokes, trip time across the warehouse, missing information and other time-eaters can be effectively eliminated by engaging staff in in the process and conveying a sense that their input matters.

What's more, extending open lines of communication beyond the initial ramp-up can be a prime motivator for all involved. Sharing information, such as a daily scorecard, gives people valuable feedback on how they're doing, while also providing management a gauge on who the A players are and who needs more coaching to rise in rank.

Using your system implementation as a platform to reset your labor standards, policies and procedures could be among the best collateral benefits that come out of your project.



Closing Thoughts

**You've heard the old adage, "Proper planning prevents poor performance."
Well, here's something to add: "If proper planning prevents poor performance, people planning promotes peak performance."**

Tackling a WMS or LMS implementation project is never easy. It can be one of the most worthwhile exercises your business ever undertakes. The serious evaluation of end-to-end processes necessary to get the program right, the engagement of key people up and down the enterprise org chart, the communications involved, the teamwork required, the deft handling of change inside, outside and around the organization can all energize a company and lift it to new levels of productivity, profitability and performance.

You've heard the old adage, "proper planning prevents poor performance."
Well, here's something you can add to that: "If proper planning prevents poor performance, people planning promotes peak performance."

The fact is, no project will ever come off without a hitch. But with everyone on board and pointed in the right direction, the journey itself will be well worth the effort.

For more information on planning a new system implementation, or to learn more about Open Sky Group, please visit www.OpenSkyGroup.com.

About the Author

JEREMY HUDSON, DIRECTOR, OPEN SKY GROUP

As a Director at Open Sky Group, Jeremy's focus is the products and services clients need to stay competitive and flexible in the ever changing, disruptive business environment that is the world of supply chain. Open Sky Group's mission is to deliver technology-enabled solutions that allow our customers to achieve more, often with less, while having the flexibility to adapt to change. Our mission and core values are the foundation of our culture and guiding source in our interactions. Jeremy lives the core values and mission each day by bringing the best experience possible to our clients. Not only does he provide internal support to our Sales and Marketing team through software demonstrations, presentations and industry interviews, he is an essential member of implementation teams, working alongside our clients, encouraging them to use innovation and best practices instead of customizations for their long-term success.

Additional Resources

[1 – Agile is Not the Latest Business Fad for Enterprise Implementations - Steve Banker, Forbes](#)

[2- Blue Yonder WMS Integration Improves Customer Service at TVS](#)

[3 - Successful WMS Go-Lives - The Keys to Surviving, Even Thriving](#)

Thanks for reading.

WE HOPE YOU FOUND THIS PAPER HELPFUL AND INFORMATIVE



If you have any feedback or would like more information, don't hesitate to contact Open Sky Group today:

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Open Sky Group, one of the first Blue Yonder WMS-accredited partners, is a gold implementation partner and reseller of Blue Yonder warehouse, labor and transportation management solutions.



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