Overcoming User Resistance to New Technology through Awareness

Technology is meant to improve productivity and efficiency. Yet new implementations rarely achieve their objectives without buy-in from users.

Organizations that fail to plan strategies and tactics to encourage user adoption usually fall short of the expected value and ROI goals for their technology. Equally important is creating the right user adoption strategy. Organizations typically focus user adoption efforts on training. While training is vital, it does not address one of the most important roadblocks to user adoption—user resistance to change.

This white paper describes reasons why some people may resist new technology and business processes and provides strategies, tactics, and tips to help your organization develop awareness campaigns that help overcome user resistance and thereby improve the value and ROI of your technology implementations.
User Resistance to Change Impedes Software Adoption

Technology has the potential to dramatically improve your organization’s productivity while reducing costs. Yet simply installing software applications will not produce the intended results. Most of the time, new software establishes new or modified business processes and practices. And the software implementation’s success and ROI depends on user adoption of both the technology and the new ways of working. Indeed, user adoption accounts for nearly 70 percent of software value and ROI. Thus, companies that fail to plan strategies and campaigns to ensure user adoption of the technology and related processes can expect to fall short of their objectives.

Typically, when organizations plan their user adoption strategies, they focus on developing programs to train their employees to use the new tools. One of the biggest challenges companies face in making technology and process changes is user resistance to change. A number of factors account for end user resistance:

- **Discomfort with change.** Technology change often leads to new practices that require people to change the way they’ve worked in the past. These changes make people uncomfortable.
- **Disagreement with changes.** Users might feel that the IT department, which is primarily concerned with the technology, doesn’t understand business needs and the jobs they perform each day.
- **Inability to see the value of change.** People may resist change if they don’t perceive the change as being valuable.
- **Inability to make time for change.** Today’s employees are busier than ever. People may resist change if they feel they don’t have time to adopt new business practices.

Organizations that wish to facilitate change must understand the type of resistance they face and implement strategies that address these particular issues. Some employees need to be motivated and educated to adhere to the changes. For these employees, organizations need to clearly communicate the long term benefits of the project. Should employees remain resistant, organizations may need to add adoption incentives.

A Methodology for Software Adoption: Focusing on Awareness to Drive Change and culture.

- **Plan** – Comprehensive strategy and plan to ensure the organization is ready to accept people, process and technology changes.
- **Awareness** – Users need to understand the value of the change and its importance to the company.
- **Acquire** – Organizations must implement a role-based learning program to provide users with the knowledge they need to use the new technology and processes to do their job better.
- **Apply** – The organization starts using the training and the new technology and processes on the job with the help of a multi-tiered support system to ensure success.

While many organizations focus on training (i.e., the Acquire phase) as they prepare users to adopt new technology, it’s critical to begin user adoption efforts by mobilizing stakeholders and creating user awareness.

Successful adoption takes more than just training: PTC University’s approach.

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A program to create awareness of technology and process changes generally includes communication activities, starting from the communication strategy to the execution of the communication plan.

Communications Strategy

Organizations need to determine the right strategy to drive awareness for their new technology implementations.

They should start by identifying their objectives for the awareness program. For example, they need to identify what information should be communicated to employees and why.

Next, identify what the change entails in terms of technology, processes, people and culture as well as assess the organization’s current level of resistance or buy-in to the change. Organizations should also consider previous experiences communicating similar projects.

With this information defined, organizations can determine who is responsible for communicating to whom, which message to communicate to which audience, and which media to use for the communication, including email, newsletters, blogs, seminars, webinars and so on.

Readiness Plan

The readiness plan defines the tasks and details necessary for organizations to properly execute the user awareness activities. It maps out all the necessary logistics, including the event schedule and timeline, determining and inviting participants, making sure conference rooms are reserved, and so on.

Execute the Communication Plan

Organizations carry out the specific activities and deliverables defined in the Communications Strategy to communicate the details of the system/solution to end users and well as inform users of the support available to them. For example, at project kick off they may schedule meetings to mobilize project team, and then develop a monthly newsletter to keep everyone updated during the project lifecycle.

4 Tips for Ensuring the Effectiveness of a User Awareness Program

As organizations implement their communication plan, the following tips will help ensure their success in overcoming user resistance to new technologies and processes.

1. Obtain the sponsorship of business executives and managers.

When organizations implement a communication plan, they often create communications – newsletters, blogs, emails – to explain the changes, which is good…. But none of these will be effective without the sponsorship of business management and executives. Sponsors are essential to emphasize and relay the value of the solution and the gains it will bring to the organization. Management must therefore be committed to the change and sponsor the communications to ensure their effectiveness. To demonstrate sponsorship, management should pre-announce the project, explain why they want to implement it, and explain how the new technology will support their goals.

2. Ensure that people understand the change and its consequences on multiple levels.

Employees need to understand both the strategic rationale for the change and operational details about how it will impact their job.

- Strategic communication from top management should promote the change, through the overall program vision and goals, the explanation of its need, and what it means to the organization as well as to its internal and external stakeholders.

- Tactical communications from change actors (Project team, …) targeting stakeholders and sponsors responsible for implementing the change might detail the key messages (to support them in their role of relay of communication) on the new technology and processes impacts, the project status – particularly successes and achievements.

- Operational communication from direct manager focus on how the new technology and processes will impact the daily practices, the proposed support (skills development) all along the project
3. Take responsibility for the communication with users.

To ensure the program’s credibility, management, sponsors and stakeholders at the company should take responsibility for signing and sending out communications. The software vendor can support the change and help the organization to develop the strategy and the technical message about the solution and creating communications artifacts.

4. Communicate what isn’t changing in addition to what is changing.

When creating an awareness program, it’s easy to forget about what isn’t changing. Yet people are often relieved when some things stay the same. Making sure that you communicate both changes and what’s staying the same can make employees more confident with the changes.

Conclusion

By developing comprehensive awareness strategies and campaigns that are sponsored by business executives and managers, ensuring that staff understand the changes on multiple levels, and communicating what is and isn’t changing, organizations can overcome user resistance to change. As a result, they can encourage greater adoption to achieve the full ROI from investments in new technologies and business processes.

For more information, please contact us today.

NOTE: The timing of any product release, including any features or functionality, is subject to change at PTC’s discretion.

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MAN Diesel & Turbo smooths its transition to PTC Windchill® PDMLink®

MAN Diesel & Turbo, the world market leader for large diesel engines for use in ships and powerstations and for leading suppliers of turbo machines, wanted to adopt a common engineering data management platform to support collaboration and globalization of R&D.

They needed to ensure that users of the new platform would be up and running quickly and effectively. With the help of PTC University, the company conducted an Enterprise Learning and Adoption program for 350 users across six sites in five countries.

As Guido Dresemann, Project Manager for the PTC Windchill Implementation noted, “PTC University supported us in successfully adopting PTC Windchill PDMLink in a short time frame. In particular, the professional adoption strategy and communication seminars helped us to prepare our users and organization for a smooth transition to the new solution.”

ABB high voltage products enhance acceptance and commitment to new technology

ABB High Voltage Products is a global leader in power and automation technologies that enable utility and industry customers to improve performance while lowering environmental impact. Existing data management systems met local requirements, but were unable to address global collaboration.

ABB decided to develop a common PDM platform with interfaces to the local ERP systems. Replacing old systems, working with new processes and thinking in a global context required a high level of acceptance by middle management and end users. Management therefore developed messages about targets, intensions, and impact to daily work before each training session.

The result, according to company representatives was that, “PTC University’s excellent communication skills and knowledge about soft factors in rollouts and supporting organizational changes helped us to enhance the acceptance and commitment to using PTC Windchill PDMLink.”