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EVALUATING SOFTWARE VENDOR'S IMPLEMENTATION STAFF

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Implementing a comprehensive, integrated quality management system is certainly a monumental undertaking for any manufacturer. Enterprises must be able to receive maximum value from a software vendor's implementation staff. Successful implementations require careful planning, from the nascent stages of deployment to the final optimization initiatives, in order to take advantage of the inherent cost benefits of an integrated quality management system. At the very least, manufacturing enterprises should consider the following principles when evaluating the expertise of a software vendor's implementation staff.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS PROCESS MAPPING

Manufacturing enterprises are quickly adopting lean quality management principles in order to stay competitive in a global economy. The general philosophy governing lean quality management systems concerns eliminating wasteful processes throughout the entire supply chain. Software vendors must share the vision of lean manufacturers and have the expertise necessary to analyze business processes at each critical point of

failure. Implementation personnel should ideally help manufacturers decide whether or not to migrate existing business processes or to adapt processes to suit the new quality management system. The opportunity to re-evaluate business processes is invaluable to a manufacturer that makes a true commitment to lean principles.

ESTABLISHING DECISION-MAKING PROTOCOLS

Manufacturing enterprises should be aware of the pitfall from over-relying on the expertise of a software vendor's implementation staff. Vendors must be flexible enough to offer expertise and allow decision-makers within an enterprise to establish project management protocols. The conundrum of using consultants boils down to long-term maintenance. Experts can implement the software, but few vendors serve their clients after completing an implementation project. Decision-makers must take ownership of a project rather than acquiescing to outside implementation staffs. In short, the best implementation staffs know their role and remain within the bounds of this role established by a manufacturing enterprise's decision-makers.

BEYOND BEST PRACTICES:
CONFIGURATION TRUMPS CUSTOMIZATION

Lean manufacturing principles demand that enterprises avoid software customization if feasible. Certainly, customization has its place when implementing new quality management software, but the danger lies in missing the opportunity to configure rather than alter code. Simply stated, customization is expensive and far too time-consuming. Ethical software vendors build a vast array of configurations within, and among, their software modules so that advanced configuration is possible without customization. To configure software optimally, the implementation staff of software vendors must be able to extend their expertise beyond the IT sphere and touch every level of manufacturing from the shop floor to administrative systems.

Leveraging the expertise of quality management software vendors can provide enterprises with substantial cost benefits. To successfully implement an integrated software solution, vendors and manufacturers must share common business goals.

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