Choosing the right partner

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Pharmaceutical companies should recruit partners expertise and knowledge of their industry to minimise the risks of implementing a new enterprise resource planning system

Enterprise resource planning (ERP) platforms can help companies to cut costs and significantly improve their operational efficiency, but only if they implement the right system with the support of the right partner.

A company's ERP platform is like its central nervous system. If it is healthy, the ERP system provides insights to the management team so senior executives can understand what is happening with customers, suppliers and employees. By doing this, it helps the management team to coordinate the company's resources to capitalise on new business opportunities, battle competitors, and reduce costs.

Despite recognising the critical role ERP systems play, some companies fail when it comes to implementing or upgrading their software. In fact, research from analyst firm Gartner suggests that as many as 75% of all ERP implementations are unsuccessful. To ensure they don't become one of these statistics, pharmaceutical companies must look at what caused other businesses to fail and take the lessons they have learned to find greater success with their own ERP implementations.

Just as important as selecting the right software is choosing the right implementation partner. This is the company you are relying on for their expertise and experience in implementing and getting the best out of the software you have invested in. Who can afford to employ a team of consultants who don't know how to implement software for a pharmaceutical company, or who are only learning about the requirements of the pharmaceutical industry during your implementation? Choosing the right consultants and using their skills and knowledge appropriately, as well as transferring and retaining essential knowledge within the organisation, is crucial. But what should you look for in a partner?

Your implementation partner should have a strong track record within your industry. Different industries have different requirements, and the more your partner knows about your business, the more they will be able to configure the software to cover your particular needs. Plus, software that is configured to cover typical industry processes is less expensive and time-consuming to implement.

In addition, your implementation consultant should be familiar with how your business operates and fully understand your pain points. A

partner who has superior product expertise and experience of working with businesses who have similar operations and productivity goals will be able to effectively tailor your chosen ERP solution to fit your unique business needs.

Over time, successful partners will have developed a methodology for implementing ERP software and a set of tools to back it up. Your partner will apply these to your company to expedite the implementation process.

Most implementation partners are well-versed in basic system training. However, it is critical that they also have competencies in organisational change management because this too can lead to failure if not adequately addressed. Software and technology must be supported by methods that are tailor-made to manage the organisational changes they entail.

Choosing the right partner is vital when it comes to implementing an ERP system in highly regulated industries, such as the pharmaceutical, medical device and biotechnology sectors. Companies in these industries must perform process validations on all new ERP software to ensure it complies with current Good Manufacturing Practice (cGMP) regulations.

Computer system validation (CSV) applies process validation to all computer systems involved in the production of products, in order to guarantee that these systems will consistently produce results that meet their predetermined specifications and quality attributes. Validating an ERP system helps pharmaceutical manufacturers ensure that their processes are consistent and operate in accordance with industry standards.

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An important element of CSV is the assessment of the implementation partner, which should include a partner audit. Your partner must be assessed to determine their suitability to provide a system that meets all requirements and adheres to a a documented quality management system and software development lifecycle.

Selecting the right partner for your ERP implementation is just as important as choosing the right software vendor. Without skilled professionals by your side, you run the risk of falling into that 29% of failed implementations. However, if you take the time to vet potential partners, you greatly reduce the potential for failure. ■

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