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WHAT SHOULD A PLM PROJECT TEAM LOOK LIKE?

PLM PROJECT PACK 2021

As part of our Project Pack, we have provided many insights as to why PLM has the true potential to be so transformational for any fashion apparel business; on the flip side we sometimes hear of projects that are failing or have sadly ended in disarray, with both sides blaming each other.

Once any business decides to go down the path of PLM, it's critical for all concerned to carefully consider just what makes a good PLM project team.

We all know that having a highly experienced process expert team is vital to success of your project. But this is easier said than done, especially in the context of a modern PLM solution that goes way beyond most companies' subject matter expertise.

And so we wanted to share some advice. From our experience, your new team of open-minded change agents must have at least the following ten qualities to deliver a successful RFA (Retail, Footwear & Apparel) PLM implementation.

1. Confidence

The team must feel confident with each other and be comfortable being exposed to unknowns and challenges. They should be open and comfortable explaining the challenges with the current business methods/processes/communication – this current state being known as the 'as-is'. They need to be honest and realistic about moving into unchartered territories, where they simply "don't know what they don't know". They should be open to new ways of working, that at a single process level may in fact take longer that the 'as-is', but when you look at the value these new methods bring to the entire workflow the benefits greatly outweigh the single process point disadvantage.

It's a mix of confidence and trust and, without this, the team will be challenged to make these changes. It's certainly not going to be easy; there's no perfect PLM solution. You will always find challenges along the way, buy you need to focus on the bigger picture and keep the project moving forward. Some of the team will probably loathe the idea of having to change from a trusted method to the unknown 'to-be' world. Confidence and trust will develop as the team's experience grows and as people act with integrity, especially in more challenging circumstances, and you should expect challenges to be a part of the project. All PLM projects – and in fact all technologies – have their challenges, but the team's role is to find ways to overcome these by working together. In some cases it's a matter of give and take and in others it's going to require extra support from your PLM vendor, with developments and ways of working around specific challenges.

2. Positive Energy

Many of you may not know that the founding members of WhichPLM were once part of the PDP Group, implementing many of today's leading PLM solutions. In fact, if we lump together PDM and PLM for one moment, our experience of scoping, designing, configuring, customising, and training runs in to hundreds of implementations. And the most successful PLM implementations have been those that have carefully considered the team involved, and in some cases have actually made changes to the team along the way. Another critical factor has been the level of positive attitudes in successful project, with a 'can do' attitude from the offset. If your team has a positive attitude and at the same time enjoy working together, then you're well on your way to success. This sounds like common sense to most people, but it only takes one 'bad apple' to spoil an entire project. The senior project owner must be disciplined and be ready to make some changes if they feel that any team member is not fully aligned to the challenges. On a positive note, your PLM project should be rewarding and a pleasurable experience; especially during challenging times, milestones should be celebrated and communicated around the business. Each value-chain partner is involved in helping to make the project a success.

3. Decision authority

We have experienced many challenges with PLM implementations that have failed due to the fact that the project manager and team leaders were not empowered to make judgments on changes to the current status quo. Your PLM project team must be carefully selected and empowered to make changes to the 'as-is', providing of course that these changes will give quantifiable benefits to the business. This includes the measured impact of their decisions, especially if existing processes will be affected - but remember that for the sake of the bigger picture, you may decide to make a certain process a little more complex in order to deliver greater benefits for the enterprise at large. When it comes to a PLM project, the argument of "we've always done it that way" no longer stands.

4. Foresight (recognize the time & tools involved)

Your team must be armed with the right tools, and given the right time. PLM projects experience tremendous challenges if these two key items are underestimated.

You must give your team the time away from their day-to-day work to enable them to be trained in the use of a PLM solution that may potentially be operating with a mix of best-of-breed in-house (and new) solutions - the likes of 2D CAD/CAM, or 3D, for example. They need to understand the art of the possible, or probable, if the project is to be successful. It takes time to carefully map and snapshot the current 'as-is' processes and then to use their learnings to help design the future processes. Understanding what value new tools will add to the project is going to take time to test and verify; the team will need to understand just what's involved in an API to ensure that it's going to operate seamlessly and efficiently. They will need to tailor the new PLM solution and, working together with the vendor, test APIs and process changes to ensure that they have a positive effective.

PLM cannot be rushed; it takes time, and lots of planning and testing. Our strong advice is not to start a PLM project on a part time basis, or your chances of success will be greatly diminished.

5. The right skillsets

PLM project teams should include a mix of strategic thinkers, thought-leaders, IT professionals, business process experts, and manufacturing specialists - especially if the PLM project is going to extend across the entire value-chain. It's not only a matter of good technical and internal experts, but you must also include individuals that can lead process redesign, new solution adoption, and the ability to retire old solutions and processes. Your PLM project will need experts that not only know your organisation, but who know how to drive organisational change, those that can articulate business benefits, and those that can coach a team and help enthuse them to excel. This takes a variety of backgrounds and experiences and it's truly hard at times to find the right blend, especially when time is short.

6. PLM knowledge & experience

Your PLM project team members, regardless of role type, must be armed with the required PLM best-practice knowledge, before commencing a project. Today's PLM solutions are very complex and detailed with around 40-50 modules and hundreds of processes and sub-related processes.

Its critical to the success of your PLM project that your team members understand PLM to a high degree of expertise and that they can translate this knowledge into what works best for your business. Due to the complexities with today's PLM offerings, its perfectly understandable that your internal team will not have all the answer and real-life experiences to pull from, it's a fact of life that we can't all be experts at everything!

We have seen too many examples of companies that have invested a great deal of time, effort and expense on a PLM implementation, only to find that their implementation has been led by individuals that lack real-life skills and insights into a PLM platform that goes beyond (best-of-breed) just the PLM software alone. This inevitably leads to lack of adoption, inability to maintain the solution over time, and underwhelming results at a business level. Often we find that they have bought into a PLM project and have ended up implementing only PDM.

Another critical point on the subject of your PLM team, is that any PLM project will include two teams: one made up from the customer business and the second coming from the vendors or vendor implementation partner. One of the common challenges with any project, is that during the demonstration and sales process, you will meet with a vendors A-Team - a group of people that are experts in PLM process and how their solution will best meet your needs. These people include expert demonstrators, configurators, solution architects, salespeople etc. Many times, it's assumed by the customer that they'll get these same experts when it comes to their implementation, only to find that after signing the contract those people will in fact not be implementing the solution and now they are faced with a new B-Team. It's possible that the new team are of the same level of PLM expertise, but this should not be taken for granted. Our experience would suggest that, sadly, all too often the B-Team lacks the same level of expertise and experience. It's just as critical that you should request evidence of the team's expertise within your business and product type. We would also recommend that you should request their CVs and past implementation experience before agreeing to accept people working on your project. It's critical that both teams are complimentary, and each adds value to a project.
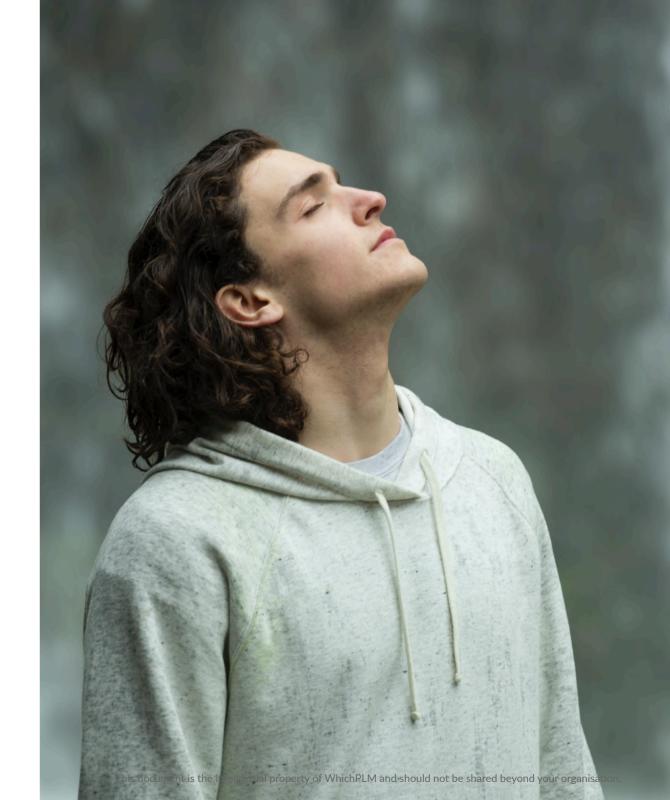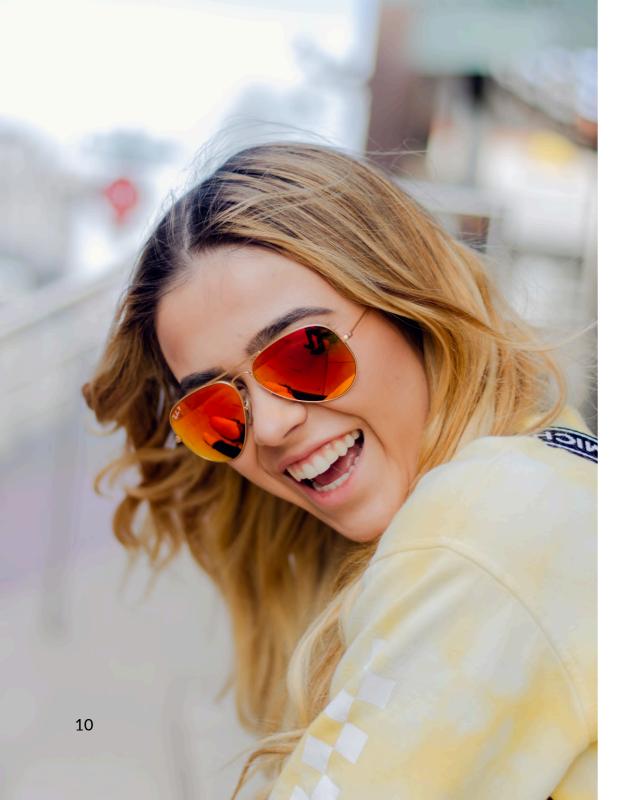
7. Willingness to participate & take responsibility

The entire team must be involved in scoping, designing and planning the project from end-to-end. Your plan cannot be built by the project managers in a sandbox conference room, away from everyone else. This is not a demonstration plan, but a bigger picture and will require the buy-in from everyone that is going to be affected by the changes that a PLM project will bring to their daily lives. This is not to say that it needs to be time consuming, but rather that your team should involve each of the key stakeholders and then take the responsibility to define the new 'to-be' documented changes.

During the execution phase, team members must be held responsible for their deliverables and value on a daily or weekly basis. When people fall short of their daily commitments or have the opportunity to say that they have not been allowed sufficient time then your project will start to fall behind. Your project team need the time and tools that will help them manage project deliverables, calculate dependencies, and stay to the project critical path and milestone achievements.

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8. Appreciation of the commitment

It's very important that each project member understands the importance of what your business is trying to achieve and that they know that they are part of something really exciting. Each team member must feel it on an individual level, communicate it constantly to key stakeholders and be motivated by the notion that they are doing something very special and transformative for the entire value-chain. If they don't understand this, take time out to educate them on why this PLM implementation is special, how it will transform your business and drive their career paths to new heights.

9. Complete trust in the process

The best team in the world can only be as effective as their belief in the PLM governance model and their trust in the commitment of the senior executive team and board sponsors. If the team lacks trust in the governance model, motivation will surely wane and if they sense the executive sponsors are less committed than they are, this will become a problem over time.

10. Openness to expert assistance

PLM projects can be challenging for a number of reasons, including assumptions that have been made by the customer or the PLM vendor. With today's fast moving IT environment, it's only reasonable for these parties "not to know what they don't know". In other words, we wouldn't expect all PLM vendors, let alone project teams and users to be complete experts at new technologies that may impact a PLM project for the better. Your PLM vendor may not have your latest request on their development schedule anytime soon, you may have some disagreements on expectations and maturity of a given process or API interface. It may be that your project is into some level of disagreement for whatever reason. In this case, we would suggest that you might leverage an outside PLM trusted advisor to help both parties to come to find ways to overcome the challenges. It's also worth considering building this into your project ahead of time to allow for those future challenges.

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