PROVIDER ICT

Benefits of ICT Reformation

Levelling the Playing Field for all

ALIGNMENT TO BUSINESS | GAME CHANGING FUNCTIONS | USABILITY

Overview

To greater or lesser extent most Providers suffer the effects of excessive manual workflows, decentralised communications and disassociated ICT applications across most if not all of their business units. Typically, each Provider has a unique bespoke solution which has evolved over time and through the demands of day to day business needs and wants. Many Providers have had comprehensive ICT plans and a succession of system upgrades or enhancements over the years. These systems have done a great job in supporting ongoing and evolving operations and the delivery of services to Provider customers however, there is always room for improvement and at times there is a need to move on. Knowing which way to move becomes the big question.

Need for Change

Just as demands sculpted the evolution of a Provider's current solution, there is now demand to cut operating costs to a minimum in order to meet Government-led regulatory reform in both Disability and Aged Care sectors. Adding to this are changes to Government reporting and price guides – these must all be factored-in since the imposed reforms are not optional but conditional to ongoing business operation.

In the new environment where Providers are to obtain and maintain 14% operating costs there are huge pressures to consolidate, simplify and streamline within and between business units. This often means boards, management and key staff must take a step back, as-sess where cost cutting should take place and where investment should take place. Knowing where, how much, how quickly and in what sequence to implement change can mean the difference between a relatively smooth transition and an unmitigated disaster. This reformation mentality is usually applied across all ICT and since most if not all business units use some ICT infrastructure, communications and applications, then a holistic mindset is perhaps the best place to start in assessing, researching and ultimately, implementing change.

Governance and Strategy of Change

The best and most honest advice that can be given to any Provider from any Vendor should be to seek consultation. The decision-making process leading to upgrade, to another solution, which solution to choose, or no change at all, should ideally contain not only a good understanding of what products and vendors are available within the market, but also an even greater understanding as to who the Provider is themselves and what their unique needs are. To identify this there should ideally be consultation both internally and externally.

Internal consultation should seek the input and advice from all board members, all management, all key staff and a section of all roles within the company. There is a wealth of hidden information and guidance from within. Starting consultation internally is good for inclusion, provides cost effective feedback and expert opinion – the greatest experts of any single company

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are the people who are already immersed in the day-to-day operations and often see where improvement ought to be.

Providers may seek consultation externally from several sources such as vendors, industry consultants, associations, board members and peers. As a general rule, vendors are attempting to sell their wares so there is always pressure to make a sale even if the consultative arm of the organisation seems and is independent, it's still pre-sales. The beauty of vendor advice is that they tend to know everything about their particular product so, Providers should take full advantage of multiple vendor demonstrations, meting conversations and negotiations in order to determine who has what and how does each one sit the Provider's needs and pain points.

Industry consultants should be independent and void of conflict of interest with good insight into what is available in the market and how to define what is important to each Provider. Consultants should also have good insight into each vendors' attributes as a company for the purposes of quality of ongoing service, support, upgrades, training and expertise - not just the product itself. Also, identifying each vendors' strengths, weaknesses, ability to work with other vendors – perhaps even competitive vendors – and previous multi-application integrations with other vendors or product-lines will go a long way in identifying capabilities and associated risk.

Each Provider will have various appetites for risk, the total amount and digestible rate of risk for each Provider will need to be determined and when change is implemented, which business units will be affected and to what degree will need to be estimated and planned for. Typically, Front Office CRM is a great testing ground for the first round as business unit risk can be limited to new client onboarding only, migrating existing clients across once training and system confidence is at a sufficiently high level.

One of the more significant risk areas to a Provider solution is staff inertia and reluctance to change. This is such a large issue that vendors and product designers are striving for ways to make the on-boarding process simpler, logical, intuitive and more enjoyable from a user experience. The degree of success of an upgrade or new solution may hinge upon system acceptance by all users and the experience they have right from the outset. The key here is to plan the user experience – the development journey – long before the implementation begins.

When, is a big question to ask. This is really the first of many subjective ICT strategy and governance questions which will come along. As ICT solutions evolves and the next generation of solutions are bought by competitor Providers, when does a Provider commence its own journey of upgrade, what is the trigger and what does it look like? Whether the deciding factor be economic, competitive, regulatory, or related to customer experience knowing when and being correct in that decision-making process is a matter of research and investigation both internally and externally.

Solution

Once the decision has been made to upgrade or perform a complete end-to-end reformation, the Provider must look to market for their correct solution and whether that be an 'out of the can', bespoke or mixed solution will more than likely be determined by the research conducted prior therefore, that investigation will need to be thorough.

The process of determining an appropriate solution should entail research, requests for additional information from a wide selection of solution options leading to requests for quotation, demonstrations from a selection of the most appropriate solutions, follow-up Q&As from a greatly narrowed selection – perhaps 2 or 3 –

and finally a series of negotiation meetings with the selected solution provider/vendor before notifying all parties of the Provider's decision. For the benefit of the industry and especially from the perspective of good business practice, brief but accurate feedback should be offered to all responding vendors who took the time and effort in offering advice, demonstrations, pricing and possibly extended communications. This gesture is critical in allowing the industry to advance in lock-step with Provider needs otherwise, the next time a Provider goes to market for solutions they may find themselves starved of features which best fit their particular needs.

Benefits

Every Provider will have their own set of unique reasons as to why they may be looking for ICT upgrades or even a complete reformation of their infrastructure. For seasoned Providers with large client bases these tend to be highly customer centric with a requirement for deeper customer insights, stronger customer engagements and reporting for analytical assessment and for fine tuning their business units up to the company as a whole. Typically, these Providers are driven by customer retention and the need to not only increase upon what they have built over many years but to also erode what benefits smaller and more agile competitors have in the market.

For other Providers the advantages of ICT change may centre around company alignment to Government Regulatory shifts and a more automated solution to terms of reporting and billing. In this instance, the vendor has a strong role in the Provider's ICT strategy, governance and alignment to Government environments. Often these types of Providers seek to engage in a strategic partnership with their solution vendor so as to have a more hands-off ICT approach within their day-to-day business.

Additionally, there are younger Providers which simply wish to leap frog years of iterative improvements in their business workflows and procedures with a solution already setup to support industry best practices and leverage their ICT solution within the market so that they may be more competitive against larger Providers with deeper pockets and dedicated business units.

Once a solution is found and implemented it should offer high levels of usability since the solution has been matched and configured specifically to the Provider and their specific business needs, this includes workflows, communications within and across business units, as well as any mobile workforce units delivering services out in the field.

Conclusion

Correctly approached and supported, a Provider will be able to define their needs, research and identify a small set of appropriately positioned solutions, establish accurate pricing, conduct thorough investigations of application features and functions confirmed through demonstration, conduct an assessment of fit for each solution option, assess each vendor's capabilities and capacity to fulfil the works, address outstanding questions and enter into communications to determine timelines and costings for all works in order to secure a successful roll-out of the best solution.

To accomplish these tasks and especially so for Providers who have never before gone through such a regime or, perhaps Providers who seek additional advice and assistance in tackling complex Enterprise Cloud applications as part of an end-to-end solution, requiring large amounts of integration work with multiple applications and vendors, then an external consultant with in-depth experience with ICT vendors would be a distinct advantage.

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