Training and Enablement

The Continuous Learning Framework from SAP: A Blueprint for Success with Your Next Software Deployment
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Enterprises the world over are deploying a new breed of digital technologies. What makes them so different is that they’re not enhancements to traditional methods and processes. Instead, they promise to transform how business is done, and even how business problems are approached, to achieve the game-changing outcome of an Intelligent Enterprise.

Will this far-reaching potential be fulfilled? The answer – and to a large extent, your company’s future competitive advantage – depends on how fully your people are equipped and empowered to use these platforms. If there ever were a time to weave continuous learning into your corporate fabric, it has clearly arrived.

Much has been said and written about the need for continuous learning, but largely at the level of principles, theories, and general aspirations. How do these lofty ideas translate to the real world? What concrete actions should you actually undertake? Where do you even start?

In this paper, SAP presents a pragmatic sequence of clearly-defined steps, based on the many years of experience the SAP organization has with large software deployments worldwide. This five-step framework is oriented toward new implementations. For existing applications, use the intermediate steps for guidance in training new users, expanding existing skill sets, pinpointing problems and knowledge gaps, and developing content to resolve them.

**DEPLOY. SUCCEED. REPEAT.**

The greatest benefit of a well-researched and tested learning infrastructure is that you only need to build it once. Then you reuse it for each subsequent software initiative. Of course, you’ll have to redefine various elements for each deployment: specific training plans, relevant user categories and courses, and customized content. But you already know what these components are, and you have the tools, resources, and processes in place to create and apply them.
Step One: Prepare project teams and key users

PREPARE AND SUPPORT PROJECT TEAMS, FUNCTIONAL GROUPS, AND OTHER KEY USERS

At the earliest stage of the project, it’s essential to provide training to the teams who will set up, manage, and support the new platform and help others learn it. Identify and engage key technical and business-side users who should have a voice in system configuration, business process and workflow design, and the layout of individual screens. Make sure these users have access to appropriate training early on.

At this initial stage, many companies find it helpful to engage outside expertise in analyzing learning needs and developing role-specific training plans. Ensure that all team members gain a strong grounding through basic courses in the new platform, and enroll group leaders in classes that cover advanced capabilities.

Suggested training tools and resources:

- Instructor-led training classes
- Self-paced e-learning materials
- Consulting services in learning needs analysis, training strategy, and program development

Results:

- Prepared teams. Your functional teams have acquired the knowledge and skills to configure, manage, and support the new deployment.
- Engaged key users. Influential users are fully involved and ready to help make important configuration and operational decisions.

“To achieve the greatest impact from SAP software deployments, organizations should provide users, administrators, and implementation team members with sufficient training.”

— Cushing Anderson, Program Vice President, Business Consulting and IT Education, IDC
**Step Two: Empower your people for change**

**EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE TO EMBRACE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**
Most people need preparation, communication, and orientation in order to feel comfortable with major change. Educate all levels of users about why the new platform is needed, the adjustments it will require, the implications for their roles, the advantages for the business as a whole, and the benefits for them personally. Enlist senior management and department leaders as boosters and evangelists. Create discussion forums about the new software on your company’s social collaboration network, and encourage questions and dialogue.

On the technical side, apply data analytics to the system slated for replacement so you can discover usage patterns, challenges, and inefficiencies. Identify those business processes used most often, rarely, or never, and apply the insights to workflow and process design for the new platform. Itemize platform customization needs, and establish user-centric migration success criteria.

Suggested training tools and resources:
- An enterprise social collaboration platform
- Software interaction analytics tools
- Consulting services in change management and data analytics

Results:
- Full employee buy-in. Your people feel included and motivated to adopt and maximize the value of the new platform.
- Baseline data. You’re equipped with metrics on your current system and indicators for optimizing and customizing the new one.

Organizations can save 10% deployment time with sufficient hours of training — in average almost a month.

Step Three: Train end-users for high performance

TRAIN END USERS TO PERFORM, AND THEN MAINTAIN AND EXPAND THEIR SKILLS
Equip end users with the knowledge and skills to succeed with the new platform. Create a learning plan for each area of expertise, specifying essential courses, training methods to be employed, customized content and tutorials to be produced, and completion timelines for the various phases. These plans will be more extensive for some users than for others.

Develop role-based courses and content as needed, drawing on blended learning to enable easy access and retention. Along with traditional classroom training, provide the flexibility of self-paced e-learning accessible online at any time, informal coaching sessions with key users, advisors, and consultants, and context-sensitive help embedded inside the application.

Bear in mind that artificial intelligence and advanced analytics are elevating mundane tasks and functions to a higher level of importance. New software is designed to proactively assist users with predictive data and alerts, transforming routine processes into opportunities for smarter decision-making. For example, a “plan to product” workflow may alert the user to buying trends, incoming orders, and customer preferences, with suggestions to order more of a certain material or design a process in a particular manner. Users need guidance in interpreting unfamiliar analytics output and should be encouraged to respond with decisions and actions beyond simply filling in fields in a screen. Design, orient, and monitor your learning plans to ensure that users gain the direction and insight they need to harness innovative software capabilities.

Suggested training tools and resources:

- A content authoring tool
- Online, self-paced training materials
- A user performance support platform
- A learning management system (LMS)
- Consulting services in learning needs analysis, training strategy, and content development

Results:

- End users are deployment-ready. Business users have acquired the knowledge and skills to work with the new platform. In addition, point-of-need assistance is available inside the application if and when needed.
- Your learning infrastructure is in place. You’ve implemented the tools and capabilities to develop, deploy, and manage targeted training content as new learning needs arise.

On average, organizations saw 7 to 13 times greater improvement in key performance measures when end-users were sufficiently trained.

Step Four: Measure progress and remediate problems

MEASURE PROGRESS, IDENTIFY SKILLS GAPS, AND DEVELOP TARGETED TRAINING TO ADDRESS THEM

It’s important to monitor user progress once your new platform is deployed. Collect and analyze real-time software interaction data from users’ desktops and mobile devices – to measure adoption rates, spotlight problems, determine root causes, and guide content authors in creating focused remedial training. You may need to enlist expert help in interpreting user experience data and learning how to apply it. For example, informed analysis may reveal that a pesky process bottleneck is caused by a system configuration error rather than a deficit in training.

Develop remedial training content and embed it in key screens and processes inside the software system for easy access where users need it most. Host and manage corrective courseware on your learning management system. And use employee surveys and exams to support your remediation efforts and gauge their success.

As critical as it is to assess user interaction with software in the early stages of rollout, don’t stop there. Adoption rates and productivity levels are always in flux. This is especially true as new users come aboard and as software is revised, fine-tuned, and extended over time.

We strongly recommend establishing a program of continuous usage measurement and analysis, coupled with corrective training and support. This is both a best practice and a foundational element for a culture of continuous learning. You’ll be rewarded with consistently higher user productivity, stronger employee engagement, and greater ROI on your software investment.

Suggested training tools and resources:

• A system to collect and analyze data on user interaction with software
• A content authoring tool
• A user performance support platform
• A learning management system
• Consulting services in data analytics and remedial content development

Results:

• Discovery and correction of knowledge gaps. You’ve pinpointed problematic areas in the software and which users are impacted, and then created and delivered specific training to resolve the difficulties.
• Optimized user performance. End users have received the support they need to work efficiently with the new software. They are now fully productive and engaged, and delivering the desired business results.

Organizational satisfaction with SAP solutions is about 15% higher when system administrators are well trained.

Step 5: Sustain adoption and optimize performance

SUSTAIN ADOPTION, OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE, AND DEVELOP AGILITY THROUGH A CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Constant change is a fact of business life. That’s why learning and software training must also be continuous. Over time, new users join the company. People change roles. Fresh data sources require integration. Infrequent users need review courses. Software updates extend capabilities and functions. Your platform needs to be applied to a new business opportunity. And so on.

Events like these occur naturally over time. If not properly attended to, they can degrade software adoption, user productivity, and ultimately, the business value of your platform.

Having implemented the learning framework, you’re equipped with the tools and best practices to preclude these negative consequences of change. Going forward, it’s imperative to keep your “training wheels” in motion. Continue to track performance, survey user teams to monitor adoption levels, identify problems, and create remedial assistance. Modify training content as necessary to keep pace with software updates. Most importantly, make sure people are taking full advantage of the range of learning resources you provide. Junior staffers should be very eager to do so. Research shows that younger employees especially value training as a way to advance their careers and are more likely to stay with companies that offer continuous learning opportunities.

From time to time, you may want to draw on external expertise in specific areas. However, from here onward you should have less need of outside assistance. Now that you’ve built a training infrastructure and acquired the expertise to use it, you should be able to sustain your program largely through in-house resources. This is one of the framework’s key outcomes and rewards: the ability to apply it to future deployments essentially on your own.

Suggested training tools and resources:

- All the training tools, systems, and platforms used in steps one to four
- Targeted consulting services as required for specialized needs

Results:

- Responsiveness to change. You have the tools and resources in place to deal effectively with the changes that naturally arise during the course of business life.
- Consistently high levels of performance. Your continuous learning infrastructure is now integrated into your company’s culture. As a matter of routine, new users are quickly brought up to speed, current users receive training in fresh skills and functionality, and knowledge gaps are uncovered and addressed.

For more information on implementing the continuous learning framework from SAP, please contact education@sap.com or visit www.sap.com/training.