

Achieving Successful Integrations:

Can't We All Just Get Along?

By Faisal Khan



Everywhere we go we are surrounded by “property,” which makes us as property professionals very much involved in peoples’ everyday lives. Recently, however, I noticed a startling parallel between the property management industry and the world in which we live and how our industry provides a metaphor for our society. I was going about my day when I took a moment to observe the people around me, specifically, their diversity and their differences. I realized that families are often comprised of individuals who can be vastly different in so many ways--in appearance, attitude, or behavior—yet somehow these people come together to form a cohesive, harmonious (ok, mostly harmonious) unit. Children possess characteristics of two parents that can be so very different from one another, and therefore maintain a persona that integrates traits from both. Rather than focusing on these differences, family members focus on what’s most important—the love they have for one another. I had a revelation: “Integrated families are no different than integrated systems and teams! Despite their differences, they can work very well together in harmony to achieve a specific outcome!” But as we all can attest to, sometimes it’s not that easy. Let’s explore some myths that can commonly make this integration challenging.

Myth #1

Integration is done through computer programs.

Myth #2

We can just hire an IT guy who can transfer the data elements from one system to another to complete integration.

Myth #3

The “best of the breed” systems are more difficult and cumbersome to integrate than traditional ERPs (Enterprise Resource Planners).

Myth #4

Implementation and integration of customized systems are more time consuming and costly than generic large scale ERPs because of the multiple vendors that must be involved in the process.

Myth #5

An integration performed on a home grown system is less likely to meet enterprise business needs and objectives.

If we let ourselves be convinced by these myths, we may miss opportunities to significantly improve business functions. I propose these as the facts:

Fact #1

An integration is a collaborative effort by several business owners of an enterprise to effectively combine business processes to streamline business operations.

Fact #2

In order to successfully complete an integration related implementation, the key is to develop an understanding of the objectives of the departments involved so that all requirements are addressed.

Fact #3

While it is advantageous to minimize the number of systems in an enterprise, “best of the breed” systems (as opposed to one enterprise system) have become much easier to implement with batch load processes due to the advancements in technology.

Fact #4

“Best of the breed” systems substantially reduce project implementation time due to their adaptability and their focus on a specific solution. A major cause of ERP failure is miscalculation of the effort and time it will require to complete the implementation.

Fact #5

ERPs broad focus often does not offer the depth of functionality for specific business functions like asset management, procurement or accounts receivable.

There is no debate that ERPs play a significant role in business operations and help develop business strategies and operations at the enterprise level. However, specific business functions are becoming more and more interested in exploring systems that will focus on their respective departmental objectives and provide comprehensive solutions. So how does this affect integrations? This shift in thought process will not only require sophisticated integration technologies but will also require close coordination among departmental leads and the IT professionals who will eventually be developing the solutions.

In early e-commerce implementations, systems played a minimal role in business strategies and operations. Over the past several years however, the strategic value of conducting

online business has become much clearer. A back office asset management tool, for example, can provide a powerful infrastructure to manage an organization’s assets including a comprehensive reporting structure. But making the most of this tool requires integration with an e-commerce suite that will collect data from other financial or procurement systems to provide a web-based CRM (Customer Relationship Management) solution to satisfy customer inquiries, organizational reporting requirements and executive management needs.

In a modern world, most chief information officers of multi-national and mid-sized organizations feel that their success lies in their ability to automate business processes and integrate these processes with an enterprise solution. The past decade has seen this integration among areas such as accounts payable, accounts receivable, and supply chain management, and most large organizations are now working to do the same for their property management processes. Hence, property managers should focus on building close ties with all other organizational elements, including information technology staff, to better integrate themselves with the rest of the organization, achieve a comprehensive and automated solution and render the property management process a vital organ of the organization’s procurement, financial and operational processes. In other words, figure out how property management fits into the puzzle of organizational processes, how it can both enhance those processes and benefit from those processes through integration, and communicate those benefits throughout your organization.

A common complaint among most business owners, including property professionals, is that it can be difficult to develop and manage a close relationship with IT professionals due to a difference in interests and personality types. Throughout several decades of dealing with IT professionals, there is one thing that I have learned about IT staff which has led to my success in



building close relationships with many. Their work is difficult, deadline driven, and at times very stressful, and they must keep up with the latest advancements in technology in order to best meet requirements. Those people working with IT staff must be mindful of these issues and not make demands expecting immediate outcomes. Just as families are comprised of many members with different personalities and interests, so are implementation teams. Of course, not everyone is going to be in agreement all the time, but recognizing and respecting our differences is key to both managing a successful implementation and maintaining a happy family! And, most important, communication is the key. The IT staff can be your most important and valuable partners in successfully achieving an easy to use, integrated and automated business solution.

In conclusion, there are several keys to completing a successful integration of property management with the rest of the enterprise. First, organizations must perform their due diligence to ensure that they choose the best asset management solution for their unique business needs. Next, it is crucial that property managers build relationships with other departments to understand their challenges so that any solution will address the

needs of all areas of the organization. Lastly, integration with the organization's ERP will be necessary not only to enhance property management processes, but to prove the value that property management can add to the organization as a whole. Remember these keys, and remember to keep your IT staff involved at all stages of implementation and you'll be on your way to a successful integration.

Happy Integrating! ■

BIOGRAPHY

Faisal Khan has more than 16 years of experience designing and implementing large scale enterprise level integrations. As Technical Director at Sunflower Systems, Faisal has successfully integrated enterprise applications at multiple federal agencies, universities, and hospitals, with a focus on financial, procurement, property management and IT systems. Faisal is involved in the development of international standards for integrations and performing InterOp tests under the umbrella of IEC. Faisal is a member of the NOVA Chapter.