

ERP Project Kickoff Speech: A Description of the ERP Journey

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The successful implementation of any ERP project requires that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility in the process, as well as realistic expectations about what is about to happen. The following talk was given by Dr. Cape at a "kickoff" town hall meeting on campus. 'BATTERY' is the name of the College's ERP project; the audience consisted of all the BATTERY Team members and their managers. We reproduce his remarks below in the hope that his "car analogy" might be of use to others who are about to start an ERP implementation.

Look around. Notice who is here. What offices do they represent ... What services do their offices provide ... How many do you know ... How many do you work with closely ... ? Your relationship with these key people in the room will change for the positive as the BATTERY project proceeds.

The BATTERY project will replace all the administrative applications programs and systems of the College.

BATTERY will establish a single transaction data base that is shared and updated and drawn upon by all of your offices; it will have very high data integrity. BATTERY will create a data warehouse of information that will become the basis for the College's strategic planning and decision-making as well as administrative office tactical and operational planning.

Let me suggest a metaphor: If the College is a car, and the driver is the faculty and the passengers are the students, then the functions and services and support that your offices provide collectively are the engine and transmission and power steering and fuel and brake systems – all the stuff under the hood and fenders. You make the car go.



This makes the BATTERY project akin to changing out the engine and all the automobile subsystems while the car is going down the Interstate at 70 MPH. Everything has to work all the time. This will take a series of small and not so small miracles. It will call for planning and scheduling and concentration and highly collaborative execution by everyone in this room.

We can't really do this in a way that no one will notice. One at a time the brakes at each wheel need to be removed and replaced and for that interval the car will have brakes on only 3 wheels. And at some point the steering linkage needs to be disconnected and re-connected, so we had better pick a daylight time when the road is straight and there is very little traffic and we can slow down a bit. And so on, you get the picture.

The fact is that all our offices will be severely stressed. As you allocate staff to BATTERY work as per the schedule, you will use every bit of elasticity of your staff. You will have to decide which services and support functions will necessarily have to be scaled back in order to fulfill your BATTERY role and also sustain your mission critical functionality and services and support.

And oh yes, many of you will have to institute moratoria on new service offerings and significant changes to existing services – simply because there will not be enough staff resources to sustain critical services AND fulfill BATTERY requirements AND have anything left over to introduce desirable, but not mandatory change and improvements. In short, we have to freeze what we have so that our starting point itself is not a moving target.

IT started down this path a year ago when we put some structure around the decision-making regarding projects that our application programmers undertake. We knew we had to bend our knees as an organization to prepare to jump into BATTERY. Your offices will now experience the same pressures as you need to re-think your work. Your clients, the faculty and students, may well experience reduced or delayed services as you figuratively disconnect a fuel line or install the new radiator or replace the transmission. Your clients WILL notice.

That's why planning and teamwork and truly effective communications for every aspect of the BATTERY project is so vitally important. I've emphasized that we are all in this together.

Soon we will choose the vendor and software suite. We will do so by reviewing vendor responses to our RFP that included thousands of individually specified functional requirements. Each of you has had the opportunity to contribute to that list of needs using Decision Director.

We will choose the vendor that offers the best fit of software to our collective needs. The decision will quite deliberately be made to optimize the outcomes for the College as a whole, and not to advantage any particular division or department.

After the choice is finalized, then we will examine true needs that were not met in a satisfactory way. Then decisions will be made about how best to satisfy unmet needs. This will lead to selection of supplementary applications that will inter-operate very effectively with the primary application suite. Then comes years of implementation, as you will see in detail in what follows. We will strongly resist the urge to un-insightfully re-implement what we now have, but using the new software. Instead we will be open and receptive to new ways of accomplishing our goals and delivering our services. We will walk away from "the way we've always done it." We will actively seek and adopt best practices.

By December of 2010 we will have completed one full semester of all the application modules "gone live." At that point we will have a functioning new "engine." Cruise control will not be on. The high-end surround sound system will not be installed. The navigation display will be a wish, not a reality. We will not have turned on all the important new software features; many bells and whistles will be missing. In some cases we will have been able to implement

just the essentials. The ability to draw reports and insights from the database will be very rudimentary. You will complain that there are too many screens to do simple transactions.

You will be asking why did we spend millions of dollars and wind up with THIS? You will remind us pointedly about how much customization had been done over the years on our legacy applications, and how simple it all used to be.

All this is normal and to be expected.

Over time we will add the bonus capabilities and fancy features and really good reports from the data warehouse. You will become adept with the new software. Then it will all feel familiar and friendly and genuinely supportive to you as you deliver your services to your clients.

Life will never be the same as it was with our legacy system. Nor would we want it to be. All our jobs will have evolved. The level of computing literacy around the College will be very substantially higher. There will be more IT strength in the administrative offices, and that is a GOOD THING. We will all be more engaged in decisions about system evolution, bug fixes, revisions and updates. This is because any change to any piece of the software suite will have the potential to affect everyone.

There will be unified governance to reflect our unified applications and our unified data bases. We will all be doing business in new, streamlined, far more effective ways. And the demands and realistic expectations of our clients will be correspondingly greater. Life will be better.

So to recap:

No more silos.

We are optimizing for the College, not for divisions or departments.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

It will be very difficult.

We will succeed.

Our success will transform the ways we do business and create a platform the College can build on for years to come. Thank you for being here, for becoming informed about the BATTERY project, and most importantly for your commitment to do what we need you to do to contribute to the College success.

If you found this speech helpful and would like to read more, please go to our website at www.collegiateproject.com and browse our ERP Library.