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Gartner for Supply Chain

Five-Step Plan for Supply Chain Technology Pilots

Many supply chain leaders struggle when evaluating supply chain planning technology vendors, because there is virtual parity across their core capabilities, but differences across other less tangible characteristics, such as usability, implementation support, integration and partnership fit. Cost is a factor, too.

Gartner analysts often hear these questions from supply chain leaders who are evaluating supply chain planning technology vendors:

- How do we know this is a better choice compared with other vendors?

- Is the solution easy to use?

- Can it easily integrate with my legacy systems?

- How will it help supply chain planners collaborate in real time?

Investing in the design and execution of a pilot builds an organization's confidence in its choice of supply chain planning technology, and helps in prepping the internal environment for deployment. A well-implemented supply chain planning technology pilot can establish the foundation for technology adoption.

Gartner mapped out a five-step plan for implementing supply chain technology pilots successfully.

1. Define and track the objective and metrics:

Your organization will use a pilot to assess any areas where there is still uncertainty and further validation is needed. Going into the pilot, you should clearly identify its business objective. What is the desired outcome or goal? When the pilot is complete, what are you truly looking to achieve that will help you make the final decision? Make sure you define upfront what success is.

2. Engage key stakeholders throughout the pilot:

Executive sponsorship plays a critical role in the success of any major project; however, its importance in this stage is of greater significance because this is the last phase before the final vendor selection. Aligning technology investments to executive business goals is a key to success. As your organization transitions from the RFI/RFP phase to the pilot phase, continue to engage the executive sponsor in the pilot stage.

3. Address data quality issues:

Given the data challenges your organization will inevitably face during technology implementation, leverage the pilot period to get a better understanding of your data. Begin to test your environment by bringing in internal and external data sources, integrating them with the solution and assessing the quality of the data. Then you can dive in, get a feel for the implementation challenges that may lead to scope creep and anticipate where you may need to place additional resources to make the implementation feel less daunting.

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4. Develop a structured change management approach:

Managing change is one of the biggest challenges organizations face when implementing supply chain planning technology. Leverage the vendor's pilot program as a springboard for business-readiness activities, and to help test internal processes, capture insights and identify required skills.

5. Form a core project team:

During the pilot phase, it is important to establish a dedicated core project team that will initially facilitate the pilot phase and can then transition to the implementation phase. The dedicated team doesn't have to be exclusively committed to the pilot project during the duration of the engagement. Rather, the goal is to ensure that expectations are set within the organization as to the degree of responsibility, ownership and appropriate time allotted from the team members' day-to-day work. Dedicated team members may include a project manager, business process analysts, superusers and integration leads.

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