A GLOBAL ERP ROLLOUT MARINATED IN DEEP INSIGHTS

Abstract

Sylvie Weidenbach, Global Business Services (GBS) Director at a £3.4 Bn food and beverage MNC, was perturbed when the Covid-19 pandemic impacted her program to roll-out SAP S/4 HANA Fiori and VIM across global F&A operations. Apart from unforeseen budget constraints, the external consultancy she had brought in to help also struggled due to their lack of insights into the on-ground processes being used across countries. This case study details how a team from Infosys BPM — already embedded in the organisation and managing several critical processes —saved the day. Their deep insights and expert functional capabilities enabled successful deployments of the new ERP across regions, well within the reduced budgets and with minimal disruption to the GBS operations.

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A weighty responsibility with unforeseen challenges

At a large, British-headquartered multinational food and beverage conglomerate, Global Business Services (GBS) Director Sylvie Weidenbach is responsible for a huge scope of its finance operations. Several years ago, the listed conglomerate — operating restaurants, bars, cafés, lounges, and convenience retail outlets across 37 countries — had decided to transition all of its group companies' ERP systems to SAP S/4 HANA Fiori and VIM. When Sylvie was tasked with the weighty responsibility of directing the program, she quickly realised the scale of the challenges she faced.

The individual companies in the conglomerate used widely disparate legacy ERP systems, and many of them had never used SAP before. Furthermore, they also employed hugely divergent processes across the countries they operated in,

especially in their finance operations. Needless to say, the transition to an enterprise-wide ERP would necessarily entail a massive process and technological transformation. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic only made Sylvie's task even more difficult. The lockdowns hit the organisation's business very hard, resulting in unforeseen budget constraints on the program.

Despite all this, by early 2021, Sylvie had kicked off a pilot implementation in one country, hiring a third-party consultancy for technical as well as program management support. But Sylvie soon realised that the consultancy, being an external agency, was unable to adequately gain insights into the on-ground processes being used across regions. She knew this lack of insights would inevitably impact the consultancy's ability to design and

implement a seamless, new enterprise-wide process, putting the continuity and service quality levels of her GBS' finance operations at risk.

With the tight budget and strict deadlines looming, Sylvie decided to seek help from Infosys BPM given that one of their digital transformation teams was already embedded in the organisation. This team, headed by Project Lead Andrew Slasky, had been managing several complex finance processes including PTP, OTC and RTR, by virtue of which they had in-depth visibility into the nuances of the processes being used across regions. Realising the value of their insights, Sylvie soon set up a series of briefings with Andrew and the team to explain the situation and integrate them into the overall program team.

Leveraging expert capabilities and embedded knowledge

Andrew who was mandated by Sylvie to manage the entire transition — encompassing process design all the way to user acceptance testing (UAT) and hypercare — had his work cut out for him. He began by directing his team to meticulously inventory the 147 legacy processes used in the GBS. After the team studied all the process documentation and work shadowed on-ground operations personnel, they then mapped the legacy processes to the newly designed global processes, identifying all the gaps and reporting them back to Sylvie's program team.

Next, Andrew participated in key design decision workshops along with Sylvie's program team and stakeholders in each country. In these workshops, they refined and redesigned the global process to cater to the local requirements, and also advised the program and technical consultants on the system changes needed to bridge the gaps they had already identified. After this, Andrew's team and Sylvie's program team sat together to devise and coordinate the execution of system integration testing (SIT), user acceptance testing (UAT), and regression testing of the solution.

Approach summary

- Inventory of legacy processes
- Refining the global process for local requirements
- Devising SIT, UAT, and regression tests
- Emergency workarounds for implementation challenges
- Hypercare and post-implementation support

Sylvie then green-signalled the roll-out of the implementation, and Andrew and his team hand-held the region-by-region deployment of the solution. After the go-live of each regional deployment, Andrew's team focused on providing hypercare, such as through two large country-specific workshops with on-site finance teams. Thus, while the overall program team moved onto the next country, Andrew's team continued to provide support to the on-ground operations personnel and helped address post-implementation issues. This involved coordinating the resolution of technical and process issues and providing additional follow-up trainings and problem-solving sessions where needed. However, all was not smooth sailing, and the project faced various challenges as it progressed through the several phases of deployment. For instance, while Andrew's mandate was largely limited to GBS finance, the ultimate success and health of the enterprise-wide solution relied on other work streams such as master data and operations. So, several misalignments between these workstreams resulted in process issues after the solution went live. Additionally, the initial deployment of the solution was characterised by insufficient availability and training of busy end users for testing, as well as a severe lack of standardised instructions and tests for finance processes. Moreover, each regional deployment ran on a very tight schedule with little time available for technical consultants to make localised changes based on Andrew's recommendations. Thus, the regional implementation was often found still under construction even deep into the testing phase.

All this placed a lot of unexpected pressure on Andrew and his team. However, they approached these challenges with agility, analysing the root causes of go-live failures, flagging critical dependencies, and communicating with Sylvie's program team on the need to adapt the remaining regional deployments based on these learnings. Where needed, they also proposed, designed, and implemented emergency workarounds for the first few weeks after the go-lives in each region, while parts of the solution were still being built. Lastly, they filled in the gaps in the testing requirements of the solution, taking over the onus for both designing and scheduling the tests as well as training the end users for testing. They also took care that the testing schedules caused minimal disruption to the regular day-to-day tasks of the end users.

Delivering beyond expectations

Today, Sylvie is relieved that her ERP roll-out program progressed smoothly with negligible delays, without any increase in project costs, with minimal disruption, and with several other outcomes surpassing her expectations.

Key benefits

- Error free process design
- On-time UAT testing
- Automated KPI tracking
- Within budget project execution with no delays
- Minimal disruption to operations during transition

Thus far, her F&A GBS organisation has had six successful deployments of the solution across four countries. Through these phases, Andrew and his team designed and conducted over 1000 SIT, UAT, and regression tests on all the key accounting processes, identifying many gaps, raising defects, and testing the defect fixes. Not only were there no errors at the process design stage which meant that the solution did not turn out to be dysfunctional during UAT, but with the UAT also completed with negligible delays, no downstream project stage gates were delayed.

Another outcome is that Sylvie has been able to monitor the health of her finance operations continuously, despite the massive changes in the process and data sets used for measurements. This is because in the months following each go live, Andrew and his team redesigned the calculation methodology for key performance indicators (KPIs) of the GBS based on the new processes and system outputs. They also devised new reports and automated metrics to track these KPIs.

Lastly, the Infosys BPM team's painstaking hypercare and post-go live support helped increase buy-in for the new ERP system and processes, and local accounting teams were soon less inclined to implement unsanctioned workarounds. This helped to quickly decrease costs through ensuring convergence with global design. The minimal disruption for finance operations during the transition to the new accounting systems also ensured continuity of the GBS' key accounting processes such as supplier payments, and processing of invoices and bank statements.

Thus, while initially Sylvie as well as other stakeholders did have some concerns around handing over so much control to Andrew and his team, they are now fully satisfied with the critical support provided and with the success of the transition. This has helped Sylvie to effortlessly gain crucial buy-in from the F&B giant's senior management to continue with the program.

Names have been altered to preserve the identities of the people involved.

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