SAP at Accenture: Accenture’s own ERP production support model
Business challenge
To generate greater value from its own IT investments and help manage its explosive growth, Accenture made the strategic decision to migrate to a single global instance of SAP. By implementing a fully integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution for its internal business functions—starting with Finance, followed by HR, Sales, Denied Party Screening, and Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC)—Accenture has improved productivity by focusing on end-to-end processes, across business units and countries. The company has also benefitted from a single instance of integrated business data, which provides much greater visibility into the business and enables the early identification of challenges and opportunities. Finally, the ERP solution addresses statutory compliance risks that vary by country and facilitates the integration of new business areas and acquisitions.

Accenture knew that implementing a multifunction ERP system that could become an asset to leverage for the business of the future would entail more than simply changing the company’s technology platform. To achieve the full benefits of its ERP solution, the company also needed to introduce sweeping new user and application support processes and methodologies. These processes rapidly build employee proficiency, drive collaboration across the diverse internal business functions that use the ERP solution and ensure its ongoing stability and efficient operation. For this reason, Accenture set out to build a leading-edge production support environment with a partnership between business and IT, from the very inception of the ERP program, thereby reducing the stabilization period and achieving results over the long term.

What Accenture did
Resources from Accenture’s Operations Support for the Enterprise (OSE) organization, in collaboration with Accenture’s consultants and its internal IT organization, began by examining production support capabilities at a number of large-scale companies. Based on this assessment, Accenture set out to rethink the entire concept and effectiveness of production support. The result was a powerful new ERP production support paradigm comprising three primary components.

The first component was strong governance. To manage and integrate information related to enterprise functions, a governing body was formed to balance the three groups’ requirements and guide the right decisions for the business. According to Todd Harding, Accenture’s Director of OSE, “Our expansive approach to governance is arguably the most pivotal aspect of Accenture’s production support capability.” The governance structure includes business leaders from Accenture’s internal IT organization, Finance, HR, Sales, Business Operations and Geographic Services. As Harding explains, “Today, the governance structure serves as an essential integrator. It challenges each member and encourages each support person to think beyond their departmental boundaries to understand the effects that any proposed changes to the ERP might have on other processes.” Rounding out the governance model is a cross-operations team composed of IT and OSE resources, which works across three support tiers to track service level agreements, measure production support effectiveness and monitor benefits.

The second component was a robust methodology. To ensure that production support structures were in place when the new solutions went live, the team tailored and then leveraged a repeatable production support enablement methodology based on Accenture Delivery Methods for SAP. This approach ensured that the procedures, tools and people were ready to support users as soon as they logged onto the system for the first time.

The third and final component was a comprehensive, scalable support structure. For day-to-day support, one group controls master data and user security access and delivers process and technical support via a single global network and a common toolset. A three-tiered support model, in which both IT and business representatives play crucial roles is in place (see Figure 1).

Tier 1 support
• Trained Super/Lead Users provide peers with guidance on SAP-enabled processes.
• The global Technology Support organization provides technical support day or night.

Tier 2 support
• Full-time subject matter experts from Accenture’s internal business teams work with the IT team to answer escalated queries from Tier 1 and to define, prioritize, and test enhancements to the solution.
• A Business Data Architecture team governs and integrates the core master and reference data used by each of the business functions.

Tier 3 support
• Developers and technologists maintain infrastructure, solution, system performance and network.
• OSE’s Learning & Knowledge Management team manages the internal Business Procedures support sites and job aids and delivers communications alerting users to upcoming releases, outages, and/or issues affecting their ability to use the system.

High performance delivered
Stabilizing an ERP implementation can take years. Accenture’s early and ongoing focus on production support—as well as its commitment to establishing robust governance capabilities, methodologies and support structures—allows the company to quickly generate value from its solution while also adding new capabilities.

“From the perspective of our IT organization, a critical success factor for the implementation and maintenance of our single global instance of SAP has always been the ongoing engagement of our business stakeholders,” explains Dan Kirner, executive director-Global SAP and Finance Applications Lead, Accenture. “The collaborative partnership that we have forged with our internal business functions, and embedding them into our production support model at all levels, has been central to the internal process improvements that we have been able to drive for Accenture.”

By tapping IT and business resources from across the organization, Accenture developed a leading-edge production support capability that enables the company to quickly maximize returns on its ERP investment. Specifically, the production support model:
Encourages collaboration and an enterprise-wide, end-to-end process orientation that blurs the traditional functional boundaries. "Production support has helped us integrate our employee data and financial data in a powerful way and in the process, has eliminated many of the legacy activities needed to reconcile data between HR and Finance. Most importantly, we also have the integrated information necessary to make better decisions," says Alejandra Brandolin, Global HR Shared Services Lead.

Promotes standardization, which improves the company's business and risk management capabilities, while reducing costs. "We focus on quality at the source, which allows improved visibility of key information across the enterprise," points out Penny Hughes, Accenture's Assistant Controller. "More accurate information enables us to manage risks, and provide business support and analysis that helps grow the top and bottom line faster."

Reduces the post-implementation stabilization period, leading to faster value realization from new capabilities. Whereas it took four months to stabilize the initial SAP Finance implementation, more recent releases have achieved stabilization in half the time or less.

Each successive release since the initial SAP Finance implementation has added a significantly higher number of batch processes. Despite the increase in scope and growth of the business, the support teams have reduced finance, HR and sales reporting cycles by more than 30 percent. This includes a monthly pre-close of three days, financial system close in six days, internal reporting in 10 days, and the full quarterly close and report to the street process in as few as 17 days.

Establishes common, scalable support processes that ensure that new capabilities, users and business acquisitions are fully supported from the outset.

Accenture continues to look for opportunities to leverage this support model as they bring on new capabilities. In this way, the production support solution is helping Accenture optimize even more of its business capabilities and lay an even stronger foundation for long-term high performance.
About Accenture

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