

Managing the Organizational Challenges of Enterprise Portals

insight

By Malek Tayara | November 2004



Developing an enterprise portal is a complex, cross-functional activity that brings together people, data, and applications from many parts of a company. The goal of an enterprise portal is to connect a company to its many constituents – employees, customers, partners, and suppliers – by bringing the right information to the right user, at the right time. According to a recent Business Week article, “It’s now apparent the Internet is connecting far flung people and businesses more tightly than ever.”

Cutting costs has become the CEO mantra of the day, and companies are beginning to realize that a well-built portal can not only save costs, but improve productivity, efficiency, collaboration, and data access. In order to reap these benefits, an organization must consider diverse factors such as technology, organizational readiness, organizational complexity, and ownership and governance of data and applications. In addition, there must be a laser-like focus on user needs and solution adoption, as the portal will only be useful if its target audience makes use of it.

Top Infrastructure/Governance Lessons Learned

Avenue A | Razorfish has developed enterprise portals for dozens of clients from the public and private sectors over the past eight years, including Cisco Systems, Thomson Financial, Delta Airlines, and Los Angeles County. Below are some litmus tests that Avenue A | Razorfish applies to clients to ensure that they are organizationally ready for successful enterprise portal deployment.

Understand Current Assets and Data: Audits should be conducted at the beginning of the engagement to understand the assets and data systems that need to be migrated or linked to the portal. Each item should have a migration plan associated with it.

Adopt an “Outside-In” View, or User-Centric Approach: Too many organizations are mired in their own organizational structure and forget that portals and applications are developed to make users’ (customers, suppliers, partners, employees) lives easier. As a result, the portal more frequently mirrors the internal organizational structure rather than the users’ needs. An “outside-in,” or user-centric approach should drive decisions. This approach can save companies millions of dollars from deploying unusable solutions.

Secure an Executive Champion to Gain Strategic Alignment: The project must involve an executive champion who gets involved to ensure that it consistently supports the company’s strategic direction at all times. This involvement helps secure political buy-in from the top. While the executive champion will vary according to the organization, we find that involving an executive from both the business and technology sides is particularly effective.

Define the Vision, Objectives, and Success Metrics: Everyone working on the portal (technology, business, and stakeholders) should understand and be able to articulate the project mission and objectives. Each team member should be held accountable to measurable goals. These individuals should be motivated and selected for participation based on their belief system (e.g., values, thinking, and

feeling). Psychographical and personal analysis (e.g., Myers Briggs or other evaluative techniques) may be helpful in assembling the team.

Let ROI Determine Prioritization: Scope and prioritization should be dictated by return on investment (ROI). This places more structure to the decision-making process and helps address some of the political issues involved in the prioritization of releases.

Devise Early and Consistent Wins: While ROI should determine the strategic roadmap, it is important to devise some “quick wins” along the way. Large-scale enterprise portal projects can take several years to design and develop. Divide the project into sub-projects, each with its own set of deliverables. Initial deliverables should focus on key users and stakeholders, and be useful to as many people as possible. Develop a blueprint for additional features and functionality and roll them out systematically to sustain momentum and keep energy levels high. Create a “cafeteria” menu for the client to choose from; assign weighted priorities to each.

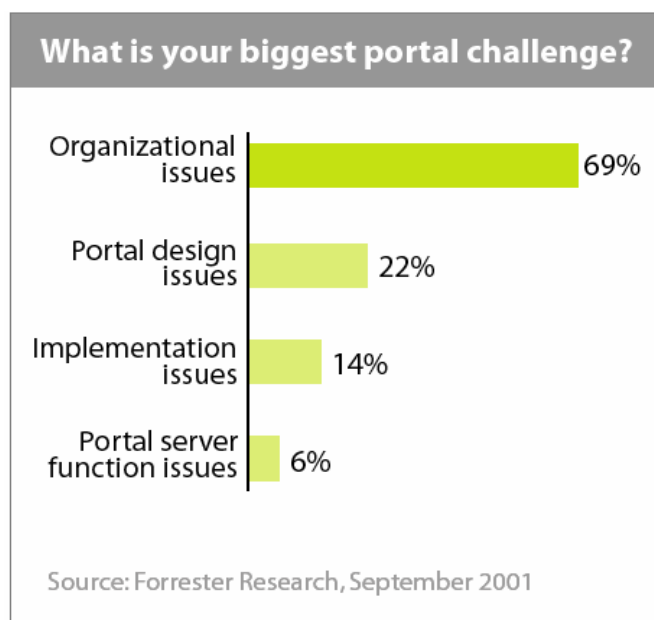
Establish a Program Management Office (PMO): Typical large-scale projects involve different groups, each with their own skill sets and points-of-view (e.g., content management, vocabulary, technology, information architecture, visual design). A PMO must be established to manage these different stakeholders and coordinate information flow. The PMO will be responsible for continually tracking performance against the project mission and establishing benchmarks for success.

Mobilize and Utilize Stakeholder Groups: Companies are advised to organize different stakeholder groups based on the project structure. For example, each group should have a contact person for content management issues and decision-making discretion. Design “bait” to elicit participation from each stakeholder group and have the executive champion step in to motivate the team from time to time. In other words: get people to do it, then get them to continue to do it!

Clarify Organizational Structure and Accountability: Organizational clarity is not simply charts and lines of authority or communication. Actual tasks, milestones, and deliverables must be developed in a way that makes plainly clear who’s Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed (RACI). The use of RACI grids as a routine project Management Control and Reporting Structure (MCRS) is advisable for complex initiatives. Stakeholders must be identified and their participation explicitly defined. This level of clarity aids in the governance and management of the project, the measurement of results, and the level of comfort of participants and stakeholders.

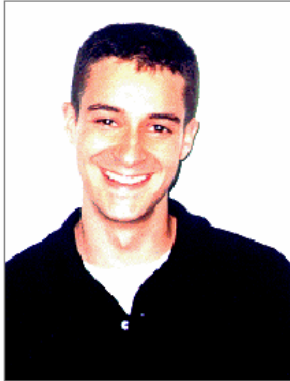
Manage the Process, While Recognizing It Will Change: Processes must be defined and communicated continuously with stakeholders. Processes must also be flexible enough to change quickly, so they do not impede the development or enhancement of the systems.

Ensure Widespread Technology Adoption: Remember that an enterprise portal is not about the technology – it is about connecting knowledge, people, and processes. If a new technology is being deployed to implement the portal, make sure that it is tested within the company’s infrastructure and that it has the support of the IT department responsible for maintaining it. Ensure that the skills and



knowledge for implementing and maintaining the technology are spread within the organization as the project progresses to minimize dependency on outside vendors and to increase the ability of different units to participate in the implementation.

About the Author



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Please share your insights or thoughts with Malek Tayara at malek.tayara@aa-rf.com.

About Avenue A | Razorfish

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