

How To: Imbedding Quality for Successful Implementations

INTRODUCTION

Companies seeking to improve their system implementations have a variety of management philosophies to choose from. Although each philosophy has its own definition of quality and how to incorporate it into solution upgrades, the most effective methods employ transparency and quality-focused client partnership, in addition to measuring data repeatedly to feed outputs back into testing for future, error-free results. This Insight will explore imbedding quality best practices for successful long-term solution implementations that balance project development speed and efficiency with constant quality oversight.

QUALITY BASICS

Imbedding quality in a long-term system implementation starts with developing a quality-focused partnership with clients, to ensure timely and successful rollouts without sacrificing high-level results. Moving forward, incorporating these basic elements is critical:

- **Collective QA.** The quality of the implementation should be the responsibility of all involved, including SMEs, decision-makers, and other key staff. This communal obligation is the foundation of the project, with quality-focused frameworks, tools, and governance models added to each sprint.
- **A "shift-left" mindset.** A "shift-left" mindset refers to the early placement of a project task, typically situated on the far left of an illustrated project timeline. By shifting left from the start, project teams first determine how clients intend to use the system, and then incorporate their perspectives into the development and testing processes during preliminary stages. By shifting left, product teams also conduct testing very early on to find issues and prevent costly errors, for smooth user acceptance testing (UAT) and go-live.
- **Data, definitely.** With an emphasis on data, project teams prioritize and measure quality KPI data at each stage and incorporate it immediately into future decision-making. This practice is a big departure from most standard implementation methodologies and helps identify potential pitfalls and challenges much earlier in the project timeline, well before rollout.

- **A data regression test library.** A useful exercise in any system integration, project teams develop a library of business-driven regression tests that match the client's expected results and are subsequently automated to capitalize on speed and accuracy. This is an invaluable, forward-looking practice as well as an investment that will pay off in future system upgrades.
- **Eyes on the prize.** Project teams need to remain focused on the implementation's end state and how clients will use the system and have it power their business in years to come.

QUALITY IN ACTION

A recent case of imbedding quality best practices involved a large retirement system whose comprehensive, built-out suite of regression tests and quality governance led to a successful implementation with an on-plan, on-time rollout. Throughout the implementation, transparency was a key element, with the project team and the client working together on a long-term strategy for the duration of the project, rather than letting a backlog of tasks accumulate. The project team frequently took a "shift-left" approach when encountering sprint issues and was able to upgrade testing cycles with more predictable quality to result in faster UAT and completion. This meant that the client actively participated in the design and implementation of the testing strategy, including all scenarios and data inputs required to validate the core solution, system calculations, inbound and outbound interfaces, system-generated reports, and the role-based security layers. Over 1,400 client-driven tests were generated and automated to provide this level of coverage, and the results of continual executions were clear in the quality metrics captured from the implementation. The automated test cycle also executed in under 12 hours, which would normally take over three weeks if done manually, saving significant time and effort.

In cases like these, imbedding quality best practices will pay future dividends as the client adopts new product features and functions as part of future upgrades, because the test library, quality measures, and the "shift-left" achieved during the implementation can be used repeatedly.

CONCLUSION

To fully imbed quality, project teams need to deliver a unique combination of best practices with common frameworks, tools, and governance models throughout each sprint. With full transparency between the project team and the client, frequent testing, and incorporating key learnings into current and future implementations, project teams can add quality from start to finish and set consistent standards for transformative, next-level engagements.

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