Six Things to Consider Before Implementing an EQMS

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What does quality management software [1] do? From a 30,000 foot view, it helps companies ensure the production and delivery of high quality products and processes. More specifically, though, it streamlines, standardizes, and centralizes cross-functional data from across the value chain. This data is used to manage and facilitate improvements in relation to each company's unique portfolio of processes, products, human capital, suppliers, and many more areas that could be named here.

During the process of selecting the right solution, the major issue manufacturing and industrial organizations face is that the vendor landscape is vast and, as a consequence, can easily become confusing. Not only is it difficult to dwindle down an idea of potential solutions, it's often a challenge to understand where to start. Do you require strength in risk management, a cloud-based solution, enterprise-level coverage, or a technology architecture that supports Java?

First Stop on the Quality Management Software Journey

Aligning the needs of your organization with the offering of vendors takes time and a considerable amount of research. In October, LNS Research released the industry's first Solution Selection Guide for Enterprise Quality Management Software [2] (EQMS). The guide's proven to be a valuable resource for many organizations over the past two months. With analyses of 18 of the industry's top vendors, it's becoming the first stop for executives in the selection process.

Understanding the Market and Comparing Solutions

Executives are using the guide to compare solutions available in the market today and generate a shortlist of vendors. Based on extensive briefings with vendors, we've created a matrix in our guide for comparison to expedite this process. It provides detail on total coverage areas, areas of strength, and areas of emerging strength. It touches on six focus points that should be top of mind for anyone involved in the selecting a quality management solution.

1. Industries

A vendor can sometimes serve fifteen or twenty industries in one way or another. What's important to understand is that many quality management processes and modules may have the ability to be implemented into an operation, but they may not necessarily have been built out for a specific industry. For instance, while a vendor with strength in life sciences might have a good quality risk management [3]application, it may not yet mirror in its ability to ensure compliance with areas such as REACH, RoHS, and the WEEE Directive for the electronics industry. The maturity of that vendor in your specific industry has to be factored into the decision-making process.

2. Geographies Served

Simply saying that a vendor has coverage in Asia could be as easy as hiring a sales person in China. It's difficult to have a true global presence without proven industry experience and a history of success. Aside from the well-established vendors in the space, what's more probable is that younger quality management software vendors have a specific region or a number of regions that are well served. Pervasion across the globe can come with time and acquisition. Again, maturity in geographies served is vital for making the most of your investment.

3. Functionalities

Understanding the functionalities needed is most likely not a task that can be done by one individual. For companies moving away from manual and paper-based systems, the educational and selection processes for quality management software often sheds light on functionalities that may not have been considered in the initial RFP. Up front, it's helpful to have a team of cross-functional employees ranging in rank to discuss and develop what attributes are required for an effective quality management software implementation. Do you need a strong CAPA process? Would a supplier portal benefit your operation? Will you use the software to measure the cost of quality [4]?

4. Company Sizes Served

Similar to geographies served, it's important to understand which company sizes vendors have proven experience in serving. Just because a vendor may offer Enterprise Quality Management Software, that doesn't mean it can support a multibillion dollar enterprise. Along the same lines, an experienced vendor that serves large, multinational industrial organizations may not be a good fit for a small manufacturer that's trying to take advantage of quality management software functionalities for the first time.

5. Technology Development Platforms

Reconfiguring your architecture can place a significant financial strain on an implementation, hurting ROI as well as the time to delivery for the software. If applications in your organization have previously been developed using Microsoft

tools, it may be an easy filter in your selection process to focus on vendors working with the .NET development platform. Ease of interoperability and the investment needed for integration should be a critical component of the decision-making process.

6. Technology Delivery Models

With developments in industrial technology [5], it's important to consider options that were not previously available such as cloud-computing and mobility in relation to traditional on-premise offerings. A company may make its decision based on the total cost of ownership desired. Does it want a small monthly fee for a web-based product that may grow over time or a large initial fee for an on-premise implementation? Does it need to get things up and running quickly or is the time for implementation less important? The ability to scale with growth or across distributed facilities is another variable here that should hold weight.

Putting Your Analysis to Use

As shown above, there are a number of factors to consider when selecting an EQMS. Too often organizations waste precious resources by not properly investigating the market for the right quality management software. Take time to educate yourself, discuss requirements with your team, read software testimonials, speak among your network, and, if needed, leverage third-party advice. What's at stake, not only the investment, but also the quality of your products and processes, is far too important to take lightly.

The EQMS Solution Selection Guide [2] helps companies filter through the sea of information to quickly understand the true strengths of vendors. Visit the LNS Research Library for more information.

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