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Project Management Software and User Restrictions - Where Less May Be More

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Many integrated job costing systems offer the ability to set up tight controls as to what users can or can't do within the software.

There is usually a basic integral restriction linked to the different access levels users are set up with. A license for a creative user might only give access to basic time sheet entry programs and information screens whilst users with the highest level of access will be able to make changes to the setup of the system as well as having access to all the functions related to the accounting part of the software.

In addition to those integral controls of entire functions of the software there are often ways to impose functionality restrictions for individual users. These might range from simply blocking off access to certain jobs for certain people through to monetary limits for cost-spending on jobs.

When planning implementations management staff are often very keen on adding restrictions and controls. So, how much control does one need?

There is a very fine line between a level of control that improves work performance and a level of restrictions that makes day-to-day work for all users so difficult, that it reduces user acceptance of their new system.

Users are not being encouraged to use a new piece of software, if this software is full of snags stopping them using it. When coming back after a few months to organisations that have initially introduced very many restrictions it often emerges that there is a need to reduce those restrictions in order to ease work flow.

An example would be employees, who prior to having the computerized job costing system, ran their own jobs and were able to purchase-order costs for those projects: If those same members of staff now when trying to record a purchase order for one of their jobs get a message coming up to say that saving the order fails unless they enter the details of a colleague who is to authorize the order, will treat this message as an "error message". They will tend to believe that there is a problem within the software. Further on they might see the introduction of this new software as an infringement on their independence to run projects and a breach of the trust they used to enjoy by their company. If thus the new system restricts their ability to do work, in particular if they need to meet deadlines, the acceptance of the new software goes down as the restrictions go up.

Experience from many implementations shows that the best way to plan for access controls prior to introducing the new software in an enterprise is to consider if there are problems with abuse at current. If users without a project management software don't abuse rules by - for example - raising purchase orders beyond their limits, there is no benefit at all in introducing limits or authorization procedures in their project management software. If users have in the past been entrusted with raising Pos and for valid reasons on one occasion need to exceed their PO limit in order to meet a crucial deadline, there is much more benefit in them recording this PO to the job costing software than raising it outside of the system and not recording it or not raising it at all risking to miss the deadline.

The solution often is, that fewer restrictions ensure a better acceptance of the software - a case

of Less being More.

© 2009 Volker Bendel - Volker Bendel is manager of the training department of Agency Software Worldwide, the producers of the "Paprika/Rebus" job costing software (<http://www.paprika-software.com>) (<http://www.rebus-software.com>).

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