

Front Office Technology Transformation Projects Require a Specialized Project Management Approach

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING THE FRONT OFFICE DURING TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS (continued)

- 5. Acknowledging the front office's workload will be significantly increased during the project** –The front office starts their workday several hours earlier than other teams, and no alternate resources can execute their primary duties. For these reasons working on project-related requirements outside of their regular hours without additional compensation is more impactful to front office teams. Additionally, since very few projects require the front office to actively participate – especially those of the magnitude of technology transformation projects – they are less accustomed to this type of increased workload. The consultant to the front office must encourage their cooperation.
- 6. Conveying the benefits of the partnership** – Subtly make front office teams glad to be working with you based on the value you deliver to them during a transformation project. This is important because it is unlikely the front office is directly paying for your contract. Most large transformation programs are executed from a large separate budget, which means the team you support may not be the team responsible for your contract. Because of this dynamic, the front office will work more seamlessly with you if they 'forget' you are a consultant, and feel you are part of their team.
- 7. Providing support and loyalty** – Hear, understand, appreciate and value the front office. Offer your subject matter expertise in a manner that lets them know you understand the decision-making power belongs to them. This closely aligns with trust as they need to also trust you are always doing your best to support them, even if it means giving them a truthful answer they may not want to hear.



The successful consultant to the front office strikes a precise balance between leading with a light touch, performing with the rigor of a project manager, and acting with the grace of a guest. They manage their responsibilities while respecting the demands on their clients' time. They become the point person for all project-related matters, thereby making the team's jobs easier. The consultant knows how to deliver information clearly, concisely and as non-disruptively as possible. For example, the consultant can aptly cover the end-to-end project phases, expected duration of each, and level of effort expected from the team during periodic 10-minute stand-up meetings; all while tracking project details like a hawk.

SPECIFICS OF A TRADING AND PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT PLATFORM IMPLEMENTATION: A CONSULTANT SERVES AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE FRONT OFFICE AND THE VENDOR

When a consultant manages the front office for trading and portfolio management platform implementations, there are additional key points to respect.

Serve as the consultant and advocate for the client's objectives, as opposed to those of the vendor. That said, the consultant must work carefully to incorporate both views into a unified vision. Never seek to divide them. It is important to slowly foster a positive relationship between the client and the vendor. All-around collaboration is integral to your success, and to the success of the project. Understand the vendor is usually the subject matter expert on the implementation, yet there is always room for interpretation and potential solutions. The more trust the client has in the vendor resource, the better job you are doing.

Successfully implementing a trading and portfolio management platform with the front office is an iterative process during which the front office's initial heavy dependence on the consultant gradually transitions to the vendor resource. During the conversion, the consultant serves as the vigilant guide; assessing levels of readiness and accord, remaining aware of external stimuli that could impact the transition, and reading cues from all stakeholders. Here are some examples of scenarios consultants should notice and remediate:

- The client is not fully grasping what the vendor is communicating to them.
 - The communication gap could be due to a mismatch between the skills of the assigned front office team member and the vendor's solution, and/or an insufficient number of front office personnel involved with the vendor's solution. In addition, the use and meaning of industry key terms can vary between vendor and front office so it is imperative that both teams fully understand the key terms used as it relates to the product and project. In all cases, it is the consultant's responsibility to identify the root causes of the gap and then foster improved communication channels.

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- Certain individuals on the client and/or vendor teams are not getting along well.
 - The consultant must first determine the root cause of the conflict, and then try to resolve it equitably. If necessary and possible, change the front office and/or vendor points of contact. Often the client misunderstands the vendor contact's role and assumes they know everything about the vendor solution, which is not always the case. Finally, when appropriate, escalate to client and/or vendor management.
- Certain meeting topics and/or durations overwhelm or frustrate the client.
 - When the front office has little to no interest in a topic, clarify for them why it is important to them or offer them an alternative to attending that meeting.
 - When a topic is likely to overwhelm the front office, give them a heads-up, and then reassure them you will support them on the subject matter.

CONCLUSION

Cornerstones of success for consultants include thoughtfully cultivating relationships, developing effective communication plans, summoning project management skills, cataloging details, and advocating for their clients.

Everyone involved in project assignments maintains a busy schedule and has conflicting priorities that divert their attention. It is up to the consultant to keep the team on track with frequent and accurate touch points, and to solicit input on process improvements that will alleviate pain points, and ultimately drive projects to meet milestones successfully.

HOW MERADIA CAN HELP

Meradia's consultants have mastered the art of managing the front office for Portfolio Managers, Traders, Risk Managers, and Quantitative Analysts alike. It's an uncommon business opportunity often met by failure by the uninitiated, especially by those who manage client stakeholders using a traditional project plan. We got this – with poise and proven process.

Contact Meradia to learn more about how our consultants can drive positive change for your organization.



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is a Principal Consultant who has deep expertise in large technical front office trading and portfolio management platform implementations.

She brings 20 years of experience in the areas of performance, risk, data and asset allocation derived from working with a breadth of hedge fund, fund of hedge fund and mutual fund strategies.

Elizabeth has served as Front Office Project Manager on two *global* BlackRock Aladdin implementations. Additionally, she has executed as Project Manager and Business Analyst within other technical asset management implementations, including post implementation clean up.

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