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 Thursday, August 14, 2008 12:40 PM/EST

That's what ESI International, an Arlington, VA-based project management training company, is saying. Based on **its survey** of "270 U.S.-based senior managers and executives in functions including IT, operations, product management and administration," ESI appears to be saying that there is a larger need for a more holistic approach to project and portfolio management (PPM) than putting some software on some servers and making workers use it.

That makes sense. But who just slaps software in an organization and forces it to work these days? Here's what ESI says about **their findings**:

- When asked to describe their organization's level of satisfaction with project management or business analysis software, including project and portfolio management and service-oriented-architecture related software, they had purchased:
- Only 9.3 percent responded that the software had met all of their requirements and expectations and 1.2 percent responded that the software had exceeded their requirements and expectations.
- 23.5 percent said the software met some of their requirements and expectations.
- 34 percent said the software met most of their requirements and expectations.
- 16 percent weren't sure.

I latch on to the 34 percent number as a decent indicator here. Over a third of those that responded said that software met most of their requirements and expectations which is ok in my book, but not excellent. In a sampling that includes a mix of job functions and skill sets, it isn't that difficult to portray and deconstruct software to look deficient. And when you follow the logic, it feels like this is a suggestive formula for saying "you need help."

You very well may need help with your approach to PPM, but that's not to say that it can fix the issue of how software is purchased, deployed and left to users to use.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the majority of companies who have mature IT practices know that enterprise-level software (be it PPM, accounting, human resources, email, what have you) is a tool box, and it's rare that you approach software as the magic solution to IT and project management or any management, honestly.

That said, the variety of software that gets chosen in an organization usually has a spectrum of back story, some which has very little to do with users.

Think about your years in IT and corporate business environments. You know that software selection in IT is a convoluted, mind-boggling game of budgetary management and vendor to SVP/CIO/CTO relations. But there is also the software that became the de facto software for a given industry: AutoCAD. Photoshop. Windows. Salesforce.

Sure, there is a lot of competition and change happening in the cloud, but depending on your industry, your CTO or other managers may go with what is considered the best for that function or best for the budget that year, and the long-term licensing that the purchase implies.

Oh, and don't forget about the schmooze factor. Sometimes the vendor offering the best tee times and ribeyes gets the contract. Or, occasionally, your hardware or operating system platforms make the decisions for your managers. Whatever the case, software purchasing is rarely about users.

Do you really **need a better PPM approach** or does **your organization need better checks and balances when it comes to software decisions** and purchases?
 I put this question to **R 'Ray' Wang**, a Forrester Research VP, who covers enterprise resource planning (ERP) and software licensing and pricing. Here's what Wang had to say:

The comments about how software is really selected, unfortunately ring true... As to the issue of PPM...

I would say the issue is not PPM, the issue comes down to the overall vendor selection process. Too often enterprises do not do enough upfront planning prior to vendor selection. When I mean planning, this includes organizing the right stakeholders and decision making authority - governance, figuring out the core differentiated processes versus the commoditized processes - business process optimization, then identifying the right approach from deployment options like SaaS or hosting - long term technology strategy, and then building the overall solutions requirement map with the portfolio that will determine the right set of vendors - vendor ecosystem.

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SYNDICATION

This need for a long term apps strategy when mirrored with PPM gives you the right tools to make vendor selection work in a repeatable fashion.

What do you think? **How is software purchased in your organization?** How is **PPM software performing** for you?

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Posted by Donald Sears on August 14, 2008 12:40 PM

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