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PLM and "French Flair", this Art of Improvisation from France

We all know that man has the extraordinary ability to adapt to the constraints of his environment. This is also true in a professional setting. When faced with an inefficient structure or ill-suited IT tools, man will always find the means to accomplish the task at hand by employing, either individually or collectively, the consummate art of adaptation, of improvisation and of working around existing systems in the most notable cases.

During certain in-house training sessions or consulting assignments at companies, when I inquire about the types of solutions put in place to resolve PLM-related problems, and responsibility for them, my client's response is sometimes : "It depends…." This "it depends" is indicative of the fact that, in addition to the company's business process repository--when

it exists--teams have developed original mechanisms, whether trackable or not, to render the systems they consider ineffective or ill-adapted, with reason or not, more efficient.

When analyzing the PLM process of a company, we find this type of response on all levels, from the most fundamental questions (How do you define a part? Who is responsible for it? etc.), to questions related to the very structure of the company (How is the bill of materials managed ? What are your requirements in terms of exchange of technical data? How do you track whether or not a change management process has been properly executed? etc.)

The underlying variability of these "it depends" should trigger an alarm for companies wishing to fully control their

engineering processes and be in a position to track and justify their operations. But this "it depends" is also the indispensable " game" present in the mechanics of the company, enabling its cogs to function without obstruction and allowing for quick response to any variation in its environment. One of the challenges of companies wishing to integrate a PLM system is to preserve these functional "games" within the PLM business process repository, which contains the standards of management activities and allows for control over them.

With respect to IT tools, we find the same problems. Parallel to the PLM information system of the company, how many "homemade" tools are utilized "under the IT department's radar"? How many Excel files, Access databases, local applications are used in some of the most critical activities of the company? What would happen if these "homemade" tools were eliminated? Could the company maintain the same level of efficiency, reactivity and resilience?

An effective PLM project, which by definition encompasses engineering and improves its efficiency, entails thorough analysis of these "homemade" tools and these "it depends" in order to understand all the complexities of a profession that are sometimes under-evaluated---the devil is in the detail---and construct a pertinent and realistic PLM program. Support would also have to be provided for all of the changes that would greatly impact engineering activities at the company.

Finally, is PLM not just, among other things, a means to limit, if not eliminate, resorting to the art of improvisation, or of at least providing a framework to render it as effective as possible while maintaining the indispensable rigorousness of managing activities of the company? This "French flair"

can certainly be found in other parts of the world at varying degrees, however, the French would like to believe that it's one of their cardinal virtues, particularly when it comes to Rugby but in other sectors as well.

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