

Exploring New Frontiers – Obstacles, Cooperation and Success

Anno Kremer (Schuh & Company) in conversation with Udo Hess, project manager at Baldwin.
Mr. Hess explains the key phases for the project's success from his viewpoint.

Mr. Hess, looking back at the past six months, what was special about the project for you?

Until now I have been responsible for the launch and development of our global electronics and control platform, which for an electrical engineer is pretty obvious. With this product project, I also reached a new frontier. Particularly during the first phase in which we examined whether or not it was economically sound to continue the production of the product segment, the challenge was quite new. Before the project, I have never had to engage with the market to such an extent. I thought that we would quickly collect some numbers, which everyone has readily available, and that we would be done in a week. Unfortunately, this is not what happened. The ongoing changes in the markets did not make the task any easier either. Because of the cooperation with the consultants of Schuh & Company, however, we were able to quickly gather reliable figures. We can gradually add on to them and also use them going forward.

Furthermore, the workshop with all developers was a very important milestone for me. It took the whole project to a new level.

Have you worked with consultants before?

Yes, of course. I have had the opportunity on several projects in the past. However, I have to admit that after some initial skepticism, it was quite a bit of fun to work together. Both, I and the consultants, were able to leverage our abilities well. I was surprised, at how thoroughly and systematically the colleagues at Schuh & Company penetrated the material and details. I was not used to this from my previous consulting experiences where processes were mapped and documented, but the implementation of new structures remained mostly superficial.

How do you assess the efforts and the results of the project?

Especially during the first phase, the search for market data and other relevant information was very time-consuming. But without this tough work, we would not have been able to work so efficiently towards the end. We created a good information base, which allowed us to be able to answer critical questions on short notice. I think that the effort was worthwhile and will pay off for Baldwin in a very short period of time. Going forward, I would want to drive this kind of effort for every suitable project.

What were the greatest obstacles for implementation?

As most often is the case, the biggest obstacle was to convince our employees. The project questioned previous development guidelines like a "kit" and modularity for some products, and with that the work of the developers over the past years. That this is not accepted widely is obvious, nevertheless it was decisive for the [project's] success. The involvement of external consultants leveraged our awareness. They were able to question everything without bias and also address the radical need for change directly. Because management dealt with the assessments constructively and openly, it guaranteed a fast implementation. The urgency and desire for a consistent implementation quickly became obvious. With these ideas in mind, we relied on the workshop and created the necessary momentum to achieve quick and good results that will help us be successful in the long term.

Final question: Would you do it the same way in the future?

Yes, by all means. I have learned a lot and I am pleased about the achieved (intermediate-) results.