

# WMS Implementation – The Human Factor

Written By  
Daniel LEE Ah Lek  
Principal Consultant  
CRISTAL Solutions Pte Ltd  
[allee@crystalsolutions.com.sg](mailto:allee@crystalsolutions.com.sg)

Implementing a WMS in a warehousing operation can be viewed in the same context as a heart transplant or major surgical operation.

Due cares have to be exercised as switching a warehouse operation from a manual managed to a WMS centric operation is as good as a 'heart change' in the warehousing operation.



In heart transplant, the doctors have numerous factors and considerations to take care of. One of the critical factors is rejection by the recipient body of the new heart.

The chemistry is of prior importance. Failure to take into consideration the tissue match can result in rejection that is fatal in many cases. Although such rejection can be controlled rejection-suppression medication, the resultant scenario can be of less desirability than the original position.

Similar reaction can arise when existing warehouse staff find adaptation to the 'new' WMS driven operation difficult, if not impossible. This will result in the failure of the implementation as the staff does not put in the effort to get the WMS to work for them as in the scenario of the human immunization working against the heart and attacking it. This often manifested in subtle sabotage to outright defiance and failure to follow given instruction.

Such scenario is not uncommon in any IT solutions implementation. However, other IT solutions implementation, the recipients, namely the staff, tends to be more prepared and therefore more receptive of new IT solutions.

Warehousing operation have been the always the backroom guys that have been asked to made do with equipment they have. This have developed a mentality that when management proposed implementing WMS, the staff views it as a threat to their rice bowl – not a wholly untrue situation in many cases although objective of implementation of WMS should go beyond reduction of headcount. In many implementations, the real saving does not come from headcount reduction.

In fact, the benefits coming from many areas such as:

1. Improvement of inventory accuracy which help to reduce safety stock buffer
2. Better customer services given that higher inventory accuracy enables the sales staff to make more confident commitment
3. Higher operation productivity as the WMS provide stocking location which reduce, if not eliminate, the need to search for stocks and lesser misplacement
4. Flexibility in staff deployment – ability to have one staff cover another which are responsible for different group
  - a. Better promotion prospect for a indispensable staff cannot be promoted as he or she is indispensable from his/her area of responsibility

Pre-live Support is a vital factor to a WMS implementation. It can liken to the mental preparation that a heart recipient is being put through for the transplant proper. This also prepares the recipient for life after the transplant.

The pre-live support components help the staff to visualize what life is like in a WMS-managed operation – the discipline that would be required and the benefits that would ultimately being realized.

In the process, the diet is adapted and change – SLOWLY. Thereby minimize the level of culture shock that is being faced in the switch to WMS-managed operation. In effect, this is a change management process.

Training is the first introduction of the warehouse staff to the implementation of the WMS in many cases. The process provides the staff with information of what the WMS is about, how to use it and what is to be expected.

Post-live support is the holding of hand of the staff to reduce the level of anxiety and unknown. As in the situation of a major operation, the patient tends to be disorientated. Much assurance is required to help him take the first step after the operation.

Post-live support provides such support, although in a different sense. It provide the supports required to prevent the staff from reverting to their old habit and build on the foundation laid during pre-live support and training.

A warehouse management system implementation as it is for all IT solution implementations need to have a human side to it to prepare the staff for change. Resistance to change always results from fear of the unknown. It is not always possible to eliminate the unknown totally in most cases.

The least that needs to be done is to minimize it.

Copyright © 2004, All Right Reserved  
CRISTAL Solutions Pte Ltd