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During the last years, we have seen the emergence of collaborative planning & decision-making software platforms, often presenting themselves as 'agile' toolboxes. These new software technologies provide now a challenging alternative to traditional software planning packages .

Therefore, organizations looking for a new software, in order to support and improve their planning process - as part of their digital transformation - are facing now a choice between 2 kind of solutions that could be categorized as either open/ fully customizable 'toolbox' or preconfigured 'Out_of_the_Box' solutions.

Hereafter, we have tried to list some elements to take into consideration before making such a strategic choice for a company.

**Niche and short-term requirements vs Global and digital transformation journey**

The nature and aim of the project itself can lead to a different approach.

Sometimes the business need has been clearly identified for a particular business topic (e.g.: inventory replenishment planning) for one or few users, centrally based or within one single department; in this case ,most likely, proven and robust packaged solutions should bring a maximum value with a minimum risk. There would be no value added in trying to redevelop similar functionalities within a toolbox, which could be somehow like 'reinvent the wheel'.

In other situations the business need impacts significantly the company strategy and interacts with other departments within the organization (e.g.: S&OP, or even better : Integrated Business Planning), while it is also quite often part of a global digital transformation journey, and as a consequence might involve many users ; in this case a collaborative decision-making platform seems be more appropriate. Why ?

1st, this kind of tool is generally capable to support an holistic approach, by managing planning and performance with different indicators and workflows for different departments, but within one single database, and therefore sharing the same company objectives;

2nd , by enabling scalability in implementing new processes, in order to give time to users to adopt them and be fully 'on board';

3rd , by adapting the front-end user interface to each individual user, and not the other way around. A packaged solution (alone) would not prevent from working in a silo, being disconnected from other departments and not aligned with company strategy.

**Strategic or Tactical Planning vs Operational and short-term Planning**

Depending on when you are on the planning horizon, the needs are different.

In the long term for Strategic Planning you may require some specialized tools for occasional usage ( e.g. logistic network design), but you would rather use a collaborative planning toolbox , in particular for global organizations, where the solution will allow manual simulations process combined with many data gathered from various sources across departments (sales, supply chain, finance, HR,..)

In mid-term, let's say 18 to 24 months horizon for S&OP planning, it is basically a process that should remain at a high level, and manual. Here, a toolbox providing a lot of simulation capabilities, ideally strengthened with strong business Intelligence features embedded, would probably better help the planner than a sophisticated planning algorithm from a packaged software.

However, when the it's time to translate the high-level S&OP into a detailed plan in order to supply and manufacture the items, and/or when horizon becomes shorter, then the need for process automatization ( e.g. constrained capacity planning optimization) , become much more crucial; this is definitely the domain of packaged planning tools (APS). These tools bring proven, state-of-the-art

planning & optimization methodology (like MRP or even more recently DDMRP), available for any industrial organization.

So somehow the distinction between long/mid-term and short-term planning is basically manual Planning vs Automatic Optimization, which indicates where toolbox or packaged solution is respectively more relevant. What matters is to consider the right tool at the right planning level.

**Best practices adoption to support growth vs Tailored solution for a mature organization**

Last but not least, the level of maturity in the organization could be also an important driver to consider before choosing a planning software.

In a fast growing company, where no existing process is in place yet, a packaged solution, preferably a simple one, will help for adoption of industry 'best practices' in planning (e.g: statistical forecasting) right from the beginning.

A more mature organization instead will beneficiate, from its own experience, the ability to build and customize a powerful and advanced planning application, based on an agile toolbox.

However, such a toolbox requires from the organization that the target planning process to be implemented with the tool is clearly understood and shared by all the stakeholders.

Indeed, implementation for such toolbox usually starts from a 'blank page' and the risk of not achieving expected results when specifications are not clearly defined is obviously high.

Sometimes, it could be also wise to remain for a while with... Excel™, and test with spreadsheets the planning process before moving forward to a new software implementation

**Conclusion/ takeaways**

In order to recap what has been described above :

If a company is looking for :

- A solution as part of a wider global digital transformation journey/roadmap
- A solution for high-level process, manual but simulation & BI intensive
- A solution to support a mature process and an organization ready..

A collaborative planning platform/toolbox could help.

While If a company instead is looking for:

- A solution for a critical but niche requirement,
- A solution for detailed planning, providing state-of-the-art optimization algorithms
- A solution that will bring industry best practices

A packaged planning software solution could help

One size does not fit all… It sounds that in many case organizations requirements are a mix of these 2 categories. How to choose then?

Well, the good news is that all software vendors have made significant progress in terms of integration and communication with external systems. Furthermore, some software & consulting companies like SUPPLAÏ (www.supplai.fr ) are specialized in combining solutions, with the aim of using each different software technology where it is best at.

So why choosing between 'Toolbox' and 'Out_Of_The_Box' ?

Think outside the box.. have both !

What do you think ?

Gilles ALAIS

**About SUPPLAÏ**

Experts in Supply Chain Planning Software and Decision-Making Platforms

Based on strong partnerships and long-established relationships with international Software vendors, SUPPLAÏ offers a selection of best-in-class specialized tools, representing state-of-the-art of supply chain planning, combined with the latest agile technologies in Enterprise Performance Management (EPM) and Business Intelligence (BI).

SUPPLAÏ also brings a team of professional experts in order to provide services including consulting, prototyping, training, support to Supply Chain Metrics / KPI implementation.



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