

Ottawa TCA: Lessons from a Rapid Implementation Project

The Riva Advantage by Ian Woodbury

The City of Ottawa's successful rapid implementation to meet PSAB 3150 accounting requirements proves that large organizations can move quickly to meet the time constraints imposed by the shrinking deadlines dictated by the operating and regulatory environment today. The techniques discussed below can be used in a wide range of circumstances to ensure the success of your projects.

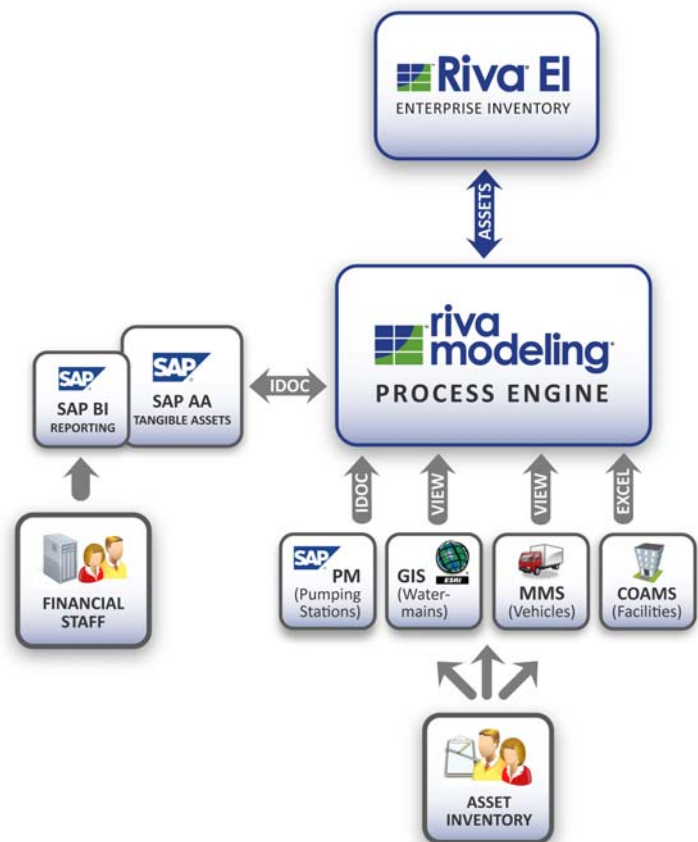


The implementation passed through acceptance testing in Ottawa's QA environment in December 2008 after only 5 months. Traditionally a project with this scope would have taken a year or more to complete however the environment has changed and municipal governments need approaches that allow them to respond to new demands in less time. We learned a number of key lessons from the project that could benefit other cities looking to achieve the same results.

In August of 2008, the City of Ottawa engaged Riva Modeling Systems Inc. along with our implementation partners IDS Scheer and Clockwork, to implement a technical tangible capital asset valuation and reporting solution for compliance with PSAB 3150. With the deadline for reporting on capital assets looming, the City required an extremely rapid implementation. Executing this form of rapid implementation within a large organization is challenging but achievable as Ottawa's experience demonstrates.

The project implemented the Riva Enterprise Inventory (Riva EI) application and the Riva SAP Asset Accounting (Riva SAP-AA) integration components to pull asset inventories from the City's operational asset management systems, value and categorize the assets, and automatically set the assets up in Riva SAP-AA. The project was also used to set the standards for the City's asset accounting implementation. Finally, it delivered a powerful, portal-driven business intelligence reporting structure that will lead the way for future reporting functionality.

... acceptance testing in Ottawa's QA environment after only 5 months.



Lessons from a Rapid Implementation Project...

Tight timeframes require rigorous schedule management

The schedule was extremely aggressive for a city as large as Ottawa. The resources involved in the blueprinting sessions spanned almost all departments. They needed to come together in a condensed timeframe to participate in the workshops that defined and detailed the solution. This required intensive resource planning and a strong commitment to the schedule by the City.

They needed to come together in a condensed timeframe...

A comprehensive blueprint is the roadmap to successful delivery

One of the major causes of dissatisfaction with projects is a misunderstanding of the scope of the solution being delivered. Whenever decisions are made, they have to be reflected in the blueprint. So, we delivered the blueprint early – after just 4 weeks of workshops. That initial delivery included a careful walk through of the contents with the City. Afterwards, we identified all

... delivered the blueprint early ...

... released new versions at each stage ...

significant decisions that impacted the blueprint and released new versions as each stage of the project was completed. This ensured the team delivered the solution the City was expecting.

City resources need to be identified early in the process so they can take advantage of all knowledge transfer opportunities

Rapid implementation projects avoid many of the pitfalls of traditional projects, but they raise a significant challenge if the City resources that will be responsible for the system after “Go Live” are

... powerful learning experiences ...

not identified prior to project start. Throughout the project there are opportunities to involve City staff in setting up and configuring the software. These can be very powerful learning experiences if the City and project resources can sit together to perform the tasks.

Small working teams speed the process

While the blueprinting sessions were very inclusive, the working sessions to make decisions for individual asset types were limited to small, 3-5 person working groups.

... 3-5 person working groups.

These teams had to identify the sources for asset information and the most appropriate mode for asset valuation.

They met multiple times during blueprinting, configuration and delivery to review the solution in participatory workshops. The iterative approach developed a strong understanding of the solution in these small teams. This clarity and sense of involvement led to very short turn-arounds for decisions and strong shared understanding of the solution.

When fixed decisions can't be made use flexible assumptions

In a project as complex as this one, certain decisions were hard to finalize. This can be caused by competing opinions, lack of standards, organizational restructuring or parallel projects within the environment that were already working towards answers to these questions. For example, in Ottawa there was difficulty selecting the scale to report condition as the City had a separate project working on developing those scales. To avoid significant delays, outcomes for these decisions were assumed and the procedure to change the system to reflect a different decision were carefully documented and identified during training. This allowed the project to move forward while mitigating the risks of the outstanding assumptions.

This allowed the project to move forward ...

Lessons from a Rapid Implementation Project...

Keep the Interfaces Simple

When integrating multiple systems, the complexity of the overall solution can become a barrier to stability and performance. Ottawa ensured the solution could scale to pull asset inventories from all source systems by designing a standardized interface definition for deliver-

... changed the integration time ... from days to hours.

ing asset information. This standard “view” changed the integration time required to load a new source of assets from days to hours.

Utilize synergies

Recognizing and capitalizing on inherent synergies within the implementation process can speed up the project

and deliver better results. One example occurred during the Quality Assurance (QA) phase of the project. While QA tasks were performed by Riva staff, Ottawa staff participated as observers allowing them to develop a practical familiarity with the system. During subsequent training when the roles were reversed with Ottawa staff performing the tasks while Riva staff observed, the Ottawa staff operated with confidence allowing them to quickly master the functionality and more. The double perspective helped both sides realize the full potential of the system.

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