

# Project Pilots

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At some point, you may have been involved with a project that looked better on paper than it did on the floor. Often this is the result of issues that arose once the project went live that were not explored during the development phase. Since it is difficult to account for every possible issue on paper, many companies employ a *project pilot*, or *feasibility study*, to see how the proposed changes will affect operations on the floor before giving the green light to a full-scale implementation. ASAP can help deliver a successful pilot to ensure your project has the greatest chance of success.

## *What does a project pilot involve?*

A pilot project has many goals, but the primary objective is to create a working model that accurately represents the desired final system. This can be a system that takes advantage of a small area of live operations involved in the change, or a separate test environment that prevents testing issues from affecting production performance. In either case, developing an accurate model helps to better define the scope which can prevent last-minute changes to the system that can often be costly and cause delays. Being able to test the changes during the pilot can reveal potential problems early on so they can be corrected before the full-scale project goes.

## *Why invest in a pilot?*

One of the biggest concerns when exploring the need for a pilot is cost justification. One common viewpoint asserts that it is more cost and time effective to build the real thing from the start, rather than spending the effort building a “throw away, scale model”. While this may be true for some projects, the work put towards a pilot upfront can have a very positive impact on the cost and timeline of a project.

A pilot effort could be looked at as a smaller, “Phase 1” to the larger project. Designed in this manner, the pilot would be rolled into the rest of the project as it is implemented, therefore no resources are wasted. This method provides a small-scale, live testing environment in which any issues can be resolved quickly and without a large impact to operations as a whole.

Alternatively, a pilot could be conducted in an isolated test environment created to exactly simulate operations in the facility. In this scenario, the changes can be tested without impact to the actual operations but can still provide valuable insight. While not physically part of the full-scale implementation, a pilot conducted in this fashion provides a test environment that can be reused to test other changes and design scenarios – a valuable tool for future projects.

Because they can identify potential problems early on, pilots can help prevent those problems from becoming “showstoppers” later on and improve the overall timeline of a project. Pilots also help to better define the scope of a project and that can provide clear, focused objectives to streamline the project and make tasks more efficient.

Pilots can be very useful when it comes to obtaining project approval. Along with a good business case, the results of a pilot provide a better understanding of the entire project than would be possible with two-dimensional images and screenshots in a PowerPoint presentation. Working through a pilot also provides a chance to test team dynamics. Complicated projects often requires people from multiple disciplines to work together, so choosing the right team can make or break a project. Lessons learned from the pilot can help optimize overall team performance and communication.

## *How can ASAP help me with my project pilot?*

ASAP Automation has years of practical experience working with clients to design systems that best meet their strategic business goals. If a pilot is right for your project, we can help design it, work with your IT department to set up a robust test environment and work quickly to tackle issues as they are uncovered.

We can also develop a computerized simulation study to help visualize changes in layouts and processes before any physical changes are made. These virtual models can be used to help evaluate potential new investments in automation and software as well as modifications to current facility operations. The results of the simulation can assist in discovering system bottlenecks and staffing requirements as well as determine maximum throughput rates.

As a cost-effective alternative to a physical pilot or virtual simulation study, clients can also ask for a fixed-price functional specification design study. This is a two-step process in which the client pays upfront for the development of a Functional Specification Document (FSD) to describe the project in detail (a standard part of the ASAP project implementation philosophy). This cost is incurred upfront and helps provide a solid foundation for the project's scope and can minimize costly changes to the design after implementation has started. Once the FSD is complete and receives approval from the client, a revised and final quote is provided for the rest of the project. This method helps to provide the most accurate quote possible in situations where the project goals aren't clear initially, or there are questions about desired functionality.

### *Conclusion*

Conducting a project pilot, simulation, or functional specification design study can help reduce risk by identifying potential issues early and providing insight into a full-scale implementation that two-dimensional images and screen-captures in a PowerPoint presentation can never reveal. Whether you are considering a project as far-reaching as an overhaul of your entire facility's processes, or just adding some additional functionality to squeeze even more productivity out of your operations, a pilot may be a helpful step. ASAP Automation can help you justify, design and implement your pilot while making sure the overall project remains on schedule and within budget requirements.