

CIO – Innovation management best practices

Tools – Step Five - Implementation

Engagement at all levels in the organization is the key to effective implementation. Whether this is at the Board level; senior management, and staff, all should be involved in the innovative process. Sometimes implementation can be spurred on by the setting up of an outside advisory group, a special Board-level committee, or even the appointment of an innovation czar. The process needs well thought out guidance and energy to sustain itself.

Perhaps the first assumption to make is that the ‘best laid plans...’; something always goes not according to plans. Anticipating problems and how to resolve them is obviously important. Implementation, after all, is the point at which people really become committed – for or against – change. Even with the best planning, issues arise that would not, could not, have been thought through during the planning step.

It is difficult to acquire data on how successful change programs are – for obvious reasons – failures are less tracked than successes but there is some information on the implementation of ERP implantation¹. Over 50% of projects went over cost estimates. While the average duration of projects was approximately 15 months, the majority took 50% longer than anticipated and, if that wasn’t enough, half the projects produced less than 50% of the benefits anticipated. Not a good story but probably more typical of the implementation of most projects whether ERP, engineering, infrastructural, architectural etc.

As implementation unfolds it is useful to remember the adage that the effort required to bring about change is 10% related to the idea and 90% the implementation. Appreciating the difficulty of the task – the first tip - ‘Tip33a’ in the Compendium provides helpful hints on dealing with people and asking the right questions in the right way as awkward situations, which always occur when setting out to make changes. Achieving a positive response to change is the target – but this takes care and appropriate tactics. A shared vision of the future – post change – is the driver. Implementation takes time and care.

Tip#33 provides insight under the following headings

- Appreciate the difficulty of the task
- How to trigger a paradigm shift in team thinking
- Create a linkage between current philosophy and situation
- Encourage dissatisfaction with the current situation
- Surface the hidden barriers to implanting improvements
- Create a pull from a shared vision of the future
- Build a critical mass to lead the way

The last point related to leadership without which not progress is possible. A key to achieving successful change is to generate the critical mass of leadership and support required to ensure continuity in the pull as necessary to ensure effective implementation. The appropriate critical mass might start out as a small group of enthusiasts (converts) or leaders but should grow to

¹ Source: HR Transformations, Toronto, based on a study by Panorama Consulting

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include a mix of people representing all levels of the organisation as quickly as possible. The critical mass will propagate quickest if fed with positive feedback on progress towards achieving the expected benefits. The slower the feedback, the more focus required on effective leadership to ensure continuity of effort in the implementation process.

Time is required to implement as is openness in the approach for example using wall posters depicting the change is an effective way of communicating progress and inviting comment. Perhaps a special room – even an electronic ‘wall’ - should be designated so people can drop in and be briefed on progress. Idea management software with its graphic capability can assist the process.

While much can be done during the planning step, it is only when actual plans begin to unfold will many people become concerned and it is during this step – implementation – that it is even more important than in the planning process – to keep communication channels open both ways.