Governing Energy

From Desktop to Hardhat

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Many of us have attended workshops, been part of internal taskforces and other office based activities to identify, quantify and implement changes in the *way we do business*. We often leave motivated and ready to execute the next great leap only to find that weeks and months later little if anything has resulted from our efforts.

Sometimes this phenomenon is type casted as resistant-to-change by individuals, departments and even the enterprise in general. Sometimes resistance-to-change can in fact be great and is perhaps the culprit.

However, there can be another scenario. The result of a brief workshop can only provide a vision or at best a very broad framework for the next steps. Like any project, a scope of work, set of deliverables, time line and budget must be established. Additionally, tasks and resources (human and otherwise) must be made available in a timely fashion.

Enter the *executive sponsor*. Ask any consultant or experienced team member and they will tell you an executive sponsor is critical to the success of a project. Seems straightforward, so why do so many initiatives still fail?

Three (minimum) criteria must be met for the executive sponsorship to be successful. These include:

- Is the initiative truly *aligned* with organizational objectives and strategy?
- Does the sponsor have a true vested interest in the success of the project? In other words, what's in it professionally/personally for her? What is his downside? Will he or she put in the time necessary to assure success?
- Are human resources truly made available as needed or is project this something they must accomplish in addition to everything else they do—their so-called *day job*?

It is relatively easy for a pundit to identify pitfalls with organizational change. The actual implementation of change is harder.

In a previous edition of this blog we referred to the importance of *execution*, where flying an aircraft or managing your daily business. Poor execution can lead to catastrophic failure but more often, it is insidious in that shapes a pattern of overall sub-optimal performance that becomes the organizational “new” norm.

Executives tend to drive to bottom line—if the initiative is not truly aligned and provides value to the organization's business imperatives and if top executives are not committed (personal skin in the game), do not proceed with the initiative.

Chances of failure in scenarios with weak executive sponsorship are high. Frustration on the part of initiative team members will be high. Interest in pursuing the next great initiative will be diminished. Perhaps a negative spiral against the NEW ensues.

Value is derived from executed initiatives not those on the bookshelf. Perhaps it is kismet that only a small number of initiatives see the light of operational day.

How does your organization verify that new initiatives are properly executed and actually contribute to the bottom line?

About the Author

Dr. Scott M. Shemwell has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the CEO of Knowledge Ops, Inc.; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations and business excellence and regulatory compliance management.