Beware The Ill-Planned Innovative Rollout

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It happens repeatedly. A company adopts a new technology platform that ostensibly will ease the workload, streamline operational processes and result in overall gains in efficiency and budget spending. The intention is spot-on but the execution is decidedly less so. A post-mortem will usually reveal errors in the execution but misses the real culprit: planning errors. While Garbage In – Garbage Out (GIGO) is true for any process, it is especially apparent in change initiatives. If the initiative is not planned properly, the end result will almost always reflect that lack of planning.

I frequently observe companies that attempt technology-based change initiatives with the latest and greatest new technologies. Many believe that the provider of this technology will also ensure that their technology will successfully effectuate the intended changes. They effectively defer the planning, execution and most importantly control to this third party. More times than not, this recipe fails and takes the change initiative down with it. The result; blame the technology and try to find a “better” technology. In other words, they blame the equipment and not themselves.

When my clients engage my consulting services to help effectuate change, I advise them that successful change involves a three-step process: Plan, Communicate and Execute. These are not mutually exclusive, as each step comprises elements of the other two steps.

Step 1 – Plan

Since planning is the most critical step, most of my attention will be here. Successful planning necessarily means an objective discovery of the real problem

driving the change. Frequently the stated and/or obvious problem is not the real problem, rather a symptom of a bigger underlying issue. We can better discover the real issue by channeling our inner four-year old and repeatedly ask *why.* In Total Quality Management (TQM), the 5-Why Process is a useful tool to achieving real issue discovery.

For example, if we are having trouble staying compliant with the Unsafe Driving portion of CSA:

Q1: ***Why are we having this trouble?***
A1: We’re ticketed too often for speeding, illegal lane changes, etc.

Q2: ***Why are we getting ticketed so often?***
A2: Because our drivers are rushing to make their deliveries

Q3: ***Why do they need to rush to make their deliveries?***
A3: Because their schedules require them to make x number of daily deliveries

Q4: ***Why do we need to schedule so many deliveries per driver?***
A4: Because otherwise we can’t meet our service commitments

Q5: ***Why are our service commitments so tight?***
A5: Because the competitive landscape requires them.

The ***5-Why Process*** doesn’t have to repeat 5 times and it could actually be more than 5 questions. When we hit a *why,* that we don’t have a clear answer for, we likely are at the real issue.

Once we have discovered the real issue, we need to properly define the scope of both the problem and its intended solution. A frequent planning occurrence is when the problem is clearly defined, but the solution slowly expands to include more than just the problem. In project management terms this is called ‘scope creep’. While it is admirable that a solution goes well beyond what it’s intended for, if the ‘well-beyond’ is not planned for, it could compromise the entire initiative. The signs of scope-creep will usually include budget and time overruns.

Once the scope has been established, proper risk management must be employed. What are the risks involved with rolling out this new technology? If it’s an EBOM rollout, will our veteran drivers have trouble with it? If they do have trouble, can we provide them the proper support? With the difficulty in finding new drivers, what is the risk with rolling out this initiative and possibly losing some veteran drivers? What is the plan if we do lose these drivers? While we cannot possibly plan for every contingency, we can plan for every category of risk. This will give us a significant head start in successfully addressing the problem and continuing on unabated.

Step 2 – Communication

There is no such thing as over-communication. The key is to provide honest, constant and relevant communication between the change team members,

upwards to senior executives and outwards to those that will be affected by the change. This communication must take place in every step of the change process for the initiative to be successful. Since most of us resist change primarily due to the fear if the unknown, we must make special and concerted efforts to combat this through every form of organizational communication (i.e. face-to-face, email, video conferencing, etc.). Most importantly, if we don't have an immediate answer, we must honestly and in a timely fashion, communicate this as well.

Step 3 – Execute

Assuming that we have planned and communicated properly, we still must execute according to plan. If we have planned properly, than the likely 'hiccups' inherent in any change initiative will have been planned for and can be addressed according to plan.

The end result will not be an ill-planned innovative rollout, but a rollout that encompasses the best of change management and, most importantly, accomplishes its intended goal(s).

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