If You Can See It, You Can Fix It

BY KEVIN CARSON

The antidote to implementation failures:
Any project that generates less-than expected benefits and/or requires a much greater investment of time and effort to achieve the defined benefits is a failed project. Sadly, this definition encompasses the vast majority of projects undertaken in the business world. Though many organizations perform some form of post-mortem analysis on failed projects, our data shows that the overall probability of success stubbornly refuses to improve. The root cause of unchanged behavior (which is ultimately the determinant of most projects' success) is inadequate awareness of the need to change. If you can't see the problem, you can't fix it.

Tips on what to look for:
There are some important warning signals of trouble that most organizations fail to pick up on and therefore suffer the consequences down the road:

- Project team members not committing sufficient time to the team – they obviously see other things as more important and their actions prove it.
- Different camps within the team, talking past each other, without resolution – each side has failed to "see" the viewpoint or concerns of the other camp, or do not see them as valid.
- The people in the process actively resisting the proposed change – they see issues unknown to the proponents of change or fail to see why change is required in the first place.
- The people in the process exercising a "silent veto" and not actually changing – same root causes as above, but manifesting itself more subtly and often over a longer timeframe.

What to Do:

The first step is the hardest: having the courage to stop a project when you find something amiss. Our tendency is to keep pushing forward in the blind hope that things will sort themselves out. The next step is to develop a truly shared vision within the team about what it needs to accomplish and what is standing in the way. That word "shared" is critical, and it dictates that everyone on the team needs to see and discuss the same data, facts, and opinions. You have to get them out in the open. Our most basic approach focuses on three key elements, tackled in the following order:

- Goals or Future State (what you need to achieve, per your team charter)
- Current State (where you stand now)
- Barriers and Constraints (what is limiting your ability to achieve the goals)

The last step is finding solutions to the barriers and constraints. In our experience, this becomes shockingly simple once you've achieved a shared vision. Most participants in the previously deadlocked tussle will smack their forehead and say "Of course" as soon as any reasonable solution comes to light.

How Air Academy Associates, in partnership with 3Circle Partners, can help:
We currently offer a variety of tactical solutions and strategic advice to our clients struggling with design and implementation of Lean Six Sigma, Design for Six Sigma and other major change initiatives These vary from 3-day Team Accelerator workshops to on-going counsel to senior executives and deployment teams who are managing large initiatives.

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