Construction Industry Institute®

The Role of Executive Support in Implementation Champion Success

Research Summary 246-1a

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The Role of Executive Support in Implementation Champion Success

Prepared by
Construction Industry Institute
Implementation Strategy Committee

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Executive Summary

The success of a new implementation process relies on two critical organizational elements:

- an implementation champion (IC) who has the primary responsibility of introducing new practices to benefit the organization, and who also offers technical support, administrative contact, management oversight, and general process support.
- the Board of Advisors (BOA) member who in the case of CII member organizations is the direct link to management, and who facilitates the IC's ability to successfully deliver the anticipated results.[1]

This research addresses the question, if the required IC support is being provided and if there is a gap between the BOA and IC perspectives, can the desired end results be achieved?

This research studied the IC's role in several major areas, including organizational support, barriers, and success measures. Of particular interest was the alignment of the ICs and the BOA members on these areas within the organizations studied. The research indicates that both IC and BOA respondents believe that

- an IC enters an implementation process with little authority and with unenthusiastic support from management.
- few organizations have defined success metrics to judge the success of an implementation effort.

Their perspectives diverge with respect to the barriers to implementation they perceive. In this regard, BOA members believe the primary barrier to implementation success is personnel-based while ICs

[1] While this study focused on CII member organizations, the dynamics between the executive sponsor and implementation champion exist, in similar fashion, within non-CII member organizations when introducing organizational change.

believe budget and risk play a pronounced role in the approval process. It is the presence of these kinds of discrepancies that challenges the success potential for implementation efforts. This research highlights the need for organizations to reconsider the roles undertaken by individuals in successful implementation efforts. It also asks organizations that are serious about improvement to reexamine the requirements for supporting ICs as they carry out their implementation responsibilities.

1
Introduction

The role of Implementation Champion (IC) is a critical position in any effort to implement new organizational work processes or project practices. The IC is the designated/assigned change agent in the organization. As such, he or she leads the effort to implement new practices and stands as the central liaison between all parties involved in the planned change. As a change agent, the IC will undertake responsibilities that cross the boundaries of strategic planning, business planning, project management, and financial controls. Although the IC does not have to be the company expert on each of these topics, he or she must enter the position with the understanding that responsibilities will include interacting with the individuals who are responsible for these areas. Concurrently, the IC must also adopt the role of implementation proponent and marketing agent at various times in the implementation process.

The diversity of responsibility associated with the position can make the position both challenging—perhaps even daunting—to the individual who assumes it. However, the importance of the IC's job makes this role a pivotal component in the ultimate success of new practice implementation. Specifically, it is the responsibility of the IC to oversee the new practice process from its initial presentation to management through the pilot phase and, beyond that, to a broader marketing phase throughout the organization. In this capacity, the IC becomes closely associated with the new implementation and its ultimate success or failure. Although this association may not reflect the totality of the effort involved with implementing a new practice, the reality of the implementation process is that one individual must take public responsibility for it.

Although the IC stands at the center of the implementation process, he or she must also work to integrate its management up and down the organizational chain. This dichotomy of responsibility is what makes the IC such a unique agent of change. Very few corporate positions require the diversity of tasks that are associated with the IC's many roles.

Additionally, very few individuals are required to interact with such a diverse audience as the IC. When combined in a single package, the IC's responsibilities and relationships make up a unique position in the implementation process, Clearly, the position requires a dedicated individual.

Current Status of ICs in CII

With a membership of over 100 organizations, CII is comprised of a significant number of organization types. Large public organizations, such as federal agencies, are represented. Both global and national product and service organizations are also represented, alongside the engineering and construction organizations that perform capital facilities delivery. And, finally, the research component of CII brings experts into the mix to provide scientifically validated input to each of the member organizations. In each of these organizations, an IC or group of ICs have the responsibility of bringing the large body of CII practices into the organization and making it relevant to their specific circumstance.

The experience and success of current ICs varies in terms of their time with the organizations they serve and their positions within them. However, this diversity does not alter the fundamental responsibility of the IC, which is to introduce new project delivery practices that can benefit the organization. This is the responsibility accepted by the ICs and the challenge that each one faces.

Study Motivation

The current study supports the ongoing effort to enhance practice implementation efforts. The ten-stage new practice implementation process that is introduced in Implementation Resource 246-2, *Steps to Implementation Success*, spotlights the importance of the IC in the implementation process. From beginning to end, the implementation process is dependent on the IC. Given this dependency, the CII Implementation Strategy Committee (ISC) has been studying IC assessments of their ability to succeed. The result of these studies has been a realization that a significant barrier to the success of new

practice implementation is the poor organizational support that ICs get. Specifically, ICs were found to believe that their ability to successfully complete their tasks is being hindered by their organizations' lack of recognition of the scope of IC responsibility.

The emergence of the ICs' concerns during the informal sessions at recent CII Performance Improvement Workshops (PIWs) was the motivation for undertaking a formal study of the ICs' roles and their perspectives on their ability to successfully introduce new practices into their organizations. Thus, the ISC undertook the current study to obtain a better perspective on current IC concerns and responsibilities, and to compare them to management's views on these issues.

Methodology

The current study used a Web-based survey to obtain responses from active ICs and the Board of Advisors (BOA) members in CII member organizations. Each IC and BOA member was sent an invitation to participate in the study. The response rate from the ICs was 35 percent, representing 39 responses out of 113 CII queries. Although total industry and company experience varies, the term of service for the respondents in an IC position was found most often to be fewer than five years. Forty-three percent of the respondents have been an IC for one year or less, and 73 percent of the respondents have been an IC for fewer than five years. Although this data would appear to skew the results towards new ICs, it reflects the trend of organizations to periodically change the IC and thus represents the demographics of the CII membership. The total response was sufficient to provide the summary results presented in this document.

The response from the BOA members was similar to that of the ICs, with their 37 replies translating to a response rate of 33 percent. The respondents' experience in their roles as BOA members correlates to the findings for the ICs, with 78 percent having served on the BOA for fewer than five years, and 30 percent having served for less than one year. Once again, these statistics reflect the tendency of organizations to change their BOA members on a regular basis.

Thirteen companies responded to either both or one of the IC and BOA surveys. The composition of the final sample pool was the following: one-third answered both surveys; one-third answered only the IC survey; and one-third answered only the BOA survey.

Although individual organizations may differ in terms of CII responsibilities and success records, the overall results documented in the report indicate the state of IC support in the CII community.

The results of the survey were grouped together to develop answers to the following key study questions:

- Do ICs have adequate time to perform their appointed functions?
- Do ICs have adequate support to succeed at implementing new practices?
- Where are ICs having the most difficulty in implementing new practices?
- What are the primary barriers to implementing new practices?
- Are ICs aware of and using existing implementation support documents?
- What level of success do ICs believe they are having?

The following sections provide answers to these questions based on the data received in the survey.

2

IC Survey Data

The following sections spotlight the key IC support questions presented in the research methodology. For each question, the survey data is presented along with an analysis of how the circumstances in question affect successful practice implementation. The circumstances addressed include time available, corporate resources, management commitment, and barriers to implementation, among others.

Adequate Time

The first of the primary IC support questions focused on determining whether ICs have adequate time to do their appointed tasks. Three questions focused on this issue, each with a slightly different perspective. The first of the questions asked respondents what percentage of their time is spent on IC activities. As illustrated in Figure 1, 57 percent of the IC respondents spend less than 10 percent of their time on IC tasks. Within this group, 13 percent indicated that IC responsibilities were handled on their own time. Only 3.3 percent of the respondents indicated that being an IC required more than 76% of their time.

The BOA response on IC time allocation was more pronounced, with 75 percent of the respondents indicating that the ICs spend less than 10 percent of their time performing IC responsibilities. (See Figure 2.)

The second question in this series also addressed the amount of time allocated to IC duties by asking whether being an IC was a primary job responsibility. While the response to the previous question indicated a small percentage of time was allocated to being an IC, 67 percent of the IC respondents reported that they were required to add IC tasks to their normal job responsibilities. (See Figure 3.) Seventy-three percent of the BOA respondents agreed with this response, indicating that IC responsibilities were indeed extra work assigned to the ICs.

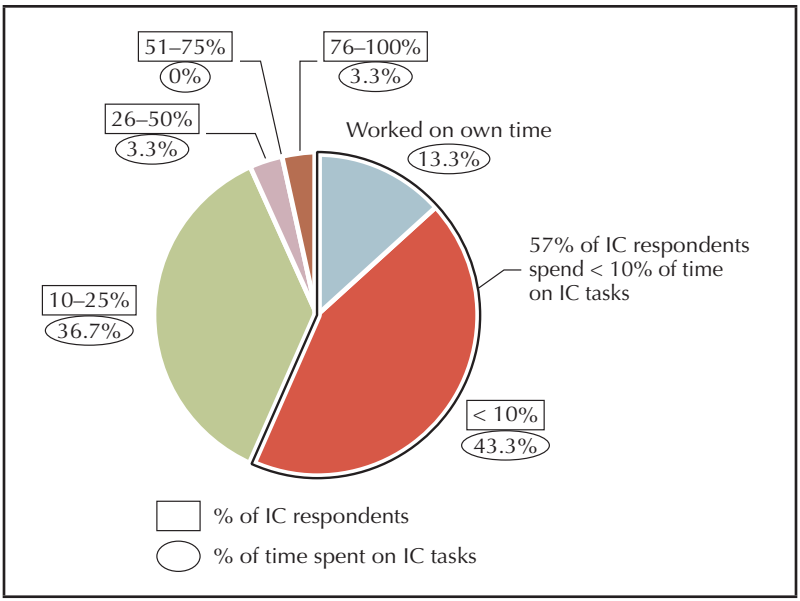

Figure 1. Percentage of Work Time Spent on IC Activities – IC Perspective

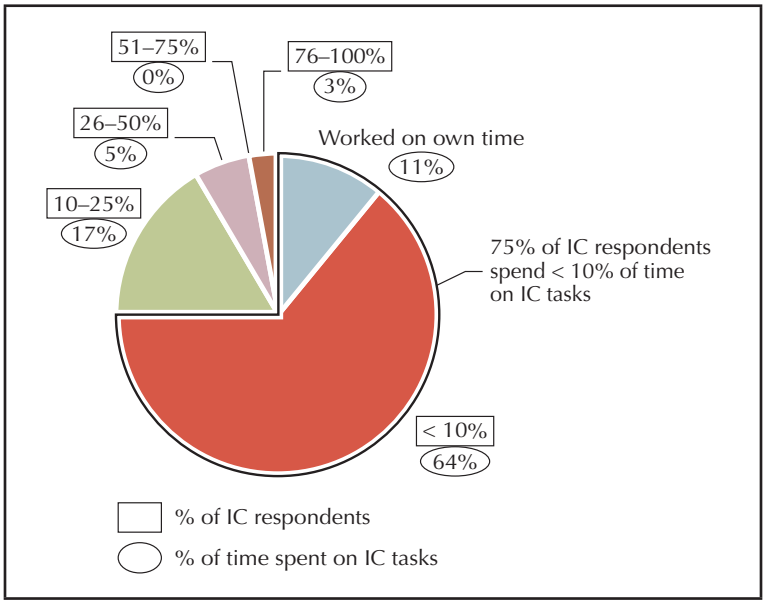

Figure 2. Percentage of Work Time Spent on IC Activities – BOA Perspective

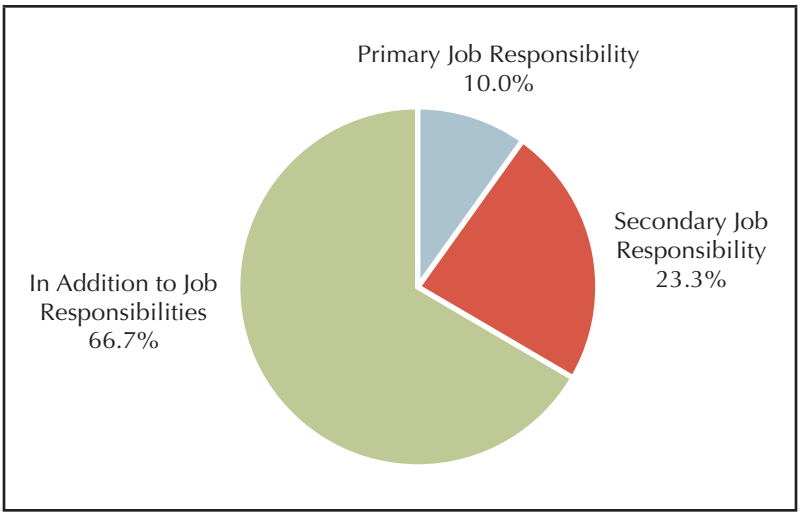

Figure 3. Is Being an IC a Primary Job Responsibility? – IC Perspective

Finally, the last question of the series asked the respondents if the current time allotment was adequate for the performance of their IC tasks. The IC response to this question was evenly split, with 50 percent of respondents replying that the amount of time was adequate and 50 percent responding that the time was inadequate. The BOA perspective was similar, with 46 percent of the respondents believing that the time was adequate to perform the IC tasks.

The analysis of these responses provides one significant finding: ICs spend a small portion of their time focusing on implementation tasks. Although there is a mixed response in terms of whether this time is adequate for the performance of IC tasks, the trend of having ICs focus fewer hours on implementation is a potential detriment to it. Given the size of the CII member organizations and the geographic distribution of their offices, this trend needs to be reversed if the organizations want new practices thoroughly implemented.

Adequate Support

The study's second major focus was on whether ICs believed they have adequate support for their IC activities. Once again, several questions were combined to analyze this topic. However, three of these questions focused specifically on visibility and level of support for IC activities. The first of these questions asked the respondents about the level of support they received from management for IC activities. As illustrated in Figure 4, 60 percent of the IC respondents believe they do not receive *active* support from management. The response from the BOA members was statistically the same with only a three percentage point difference in the responses. (See Figure 5.)

The second question on this topic focused on a specific area of support: the visibility of the IC tasks. This is an important question because it addresses organizational support for IC efforts. Figure 6 shows that, from the IC perspective, the visibility numbers were aligned with the management support numbers. Only 13 percent of the IC respondents indicated high visibility for IC implementation efforts, while 57 percent indicated low or no visibility.

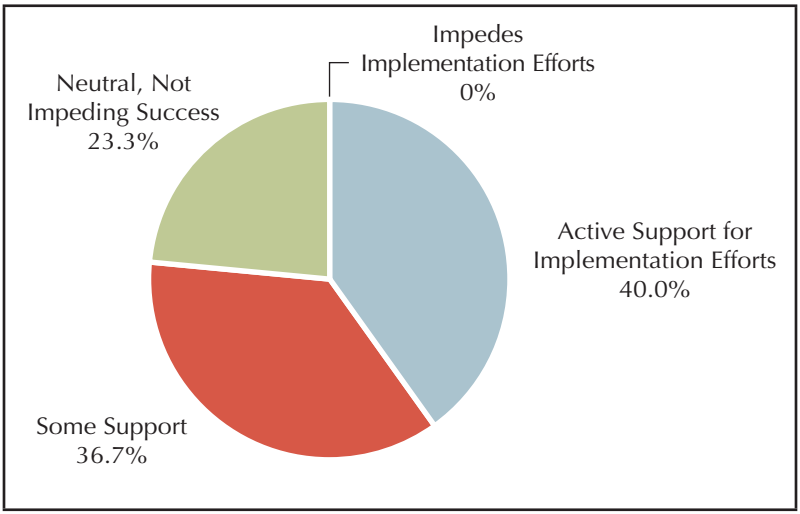

Figure 4. Management Support for IC Activities – IC Perspective

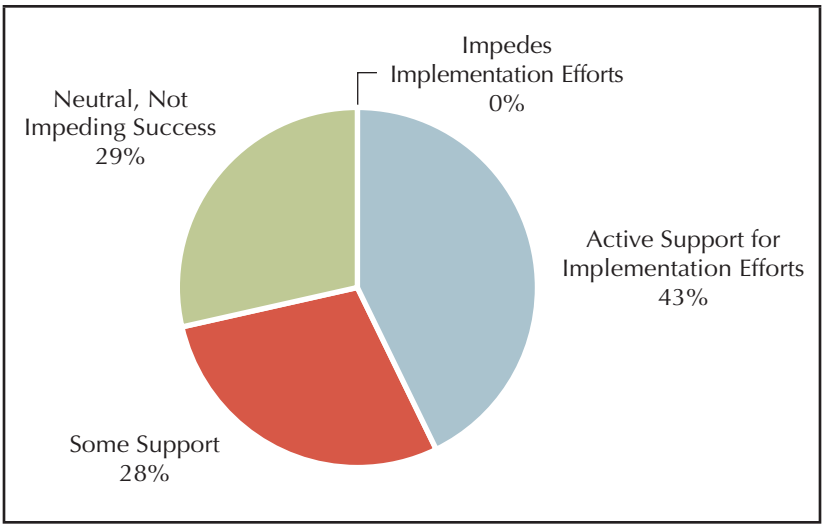

Figure 5. Management Support for IC Activities – BOA Perspective

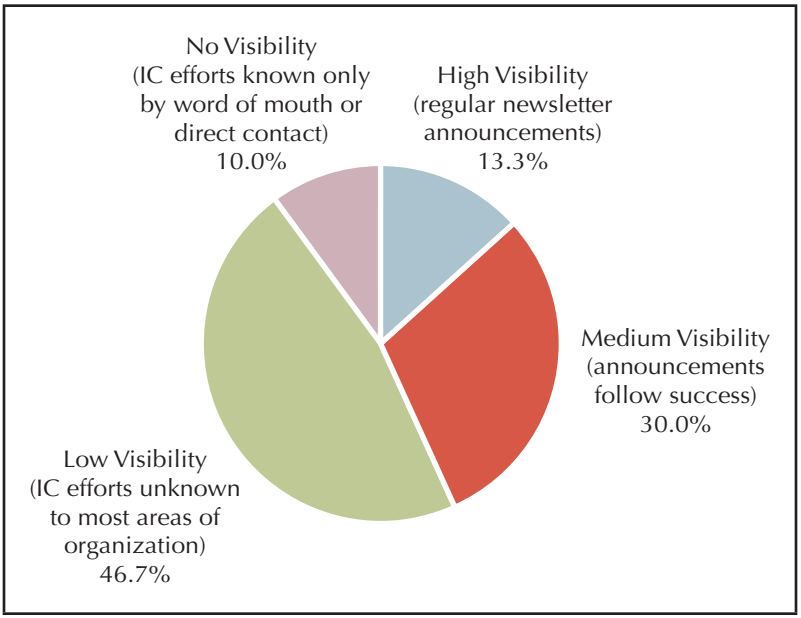

Figure 6. Visibility of IC Implementation Efforts – IC Perspective

This question is significant because it uncovers the first area of difference between the IC and BOA perspective. Figure 7 illustrates that the BOA respondents indicated a much lower level of "High Visibility" actions and a higher level of "No Visibility" actions. **This difference brings into question whether the IC respondents were overestimating their visibility, or whether the BOA respondents were perhaps not aware of some of the IC activities.**

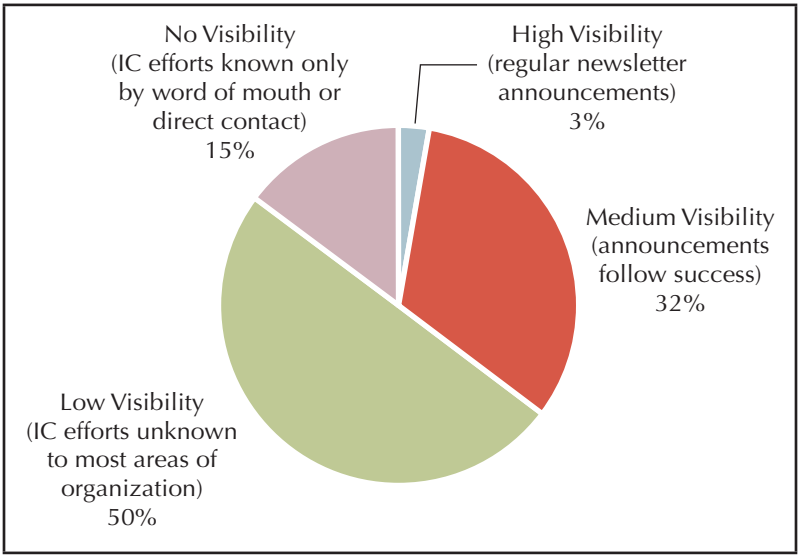

Figure 7. Visibility of IC Implementation Efforts – BOA Perspective

Finally, as a follow-up to the visibility question, the respondents were asked to indicate whether their role had been formally announced by senior management to their organizations. The response to this question provided a definite indication of the visibility issue, with 67 percent of the IC respondents stating that their position had not been formally announced by management. Similarly, 59 percent of the BOA respondents indicated that the IC position had not been formally announced by management.

The analysis of this issue focuses on the question of the importance of management support in implementing new practices. As outlined in IR 246-2, management support is a critical component of a successful

implementation process. **If management is not providing support or visibility for IC efforts, then a barrier is immediately established for long-term success. Unless ICs can change this trend in management support, they will have a difficult time establishing a new practice throughout the organization.**

Implementation Difficulty

The third area of interest in the IC study changed the focus from support to the implementation of new practices. The ICs and BOA members believed that the greatest level of difficulty would be encountered in this area. The emphasis of this part of the inquiry was on determining whether the primary implementation barriers existed at a lower level, such as at the individual project level, or at a higher level. The responses from the ICs on this were mixed. (See Figure 8.)

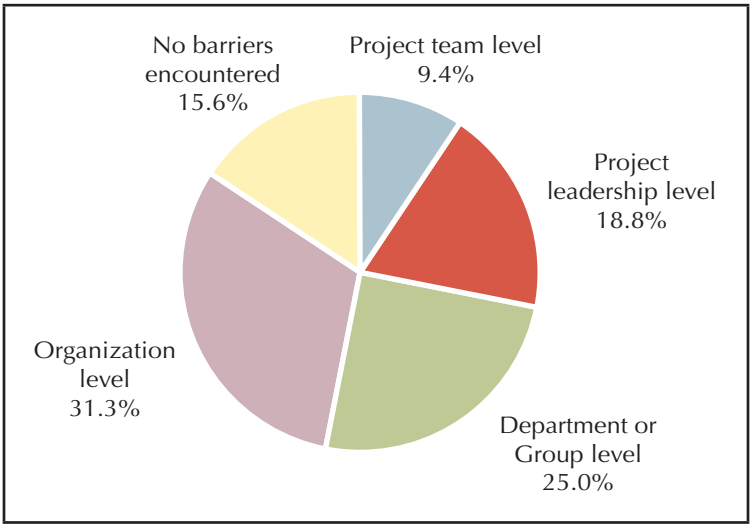

Figure 8. Location of Barriers to Implementation – IC Perspective

Although 84 percent of the IC respondents indicated that difficulties existed in implementation, their location of these barriers varied across organizations. Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicated that the organization itself presents the greatest difficulty in successful implementation. This response followed the management support trend

already noted. However, at the opposite end of the spectrum, 28 percent of the respondents indicated that project-related issues pose the main difficulty in implementation.

The BOA perspective on this question differed from the IC point of view. As shown in Figure 9, the BOA respondents placed a greater emphasis on barriers occurring at the project team level: their estimate of such barriers was at 23 percent whereas the ICs estimated them at 9 percent. There was also a belief that far fewer barriers existed at the organization level, or that barriers would not be encountered at all during the process.

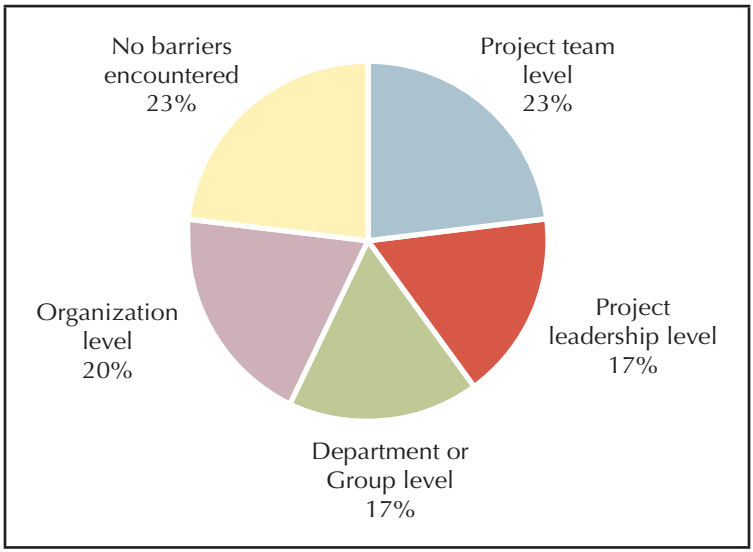

Figure 9. Location of Barriers to Implementation – BOA Perspective

The analysis indicates that difficulties in implementation can occur at any level. Depending on the organization and the personnel involved with the implementation effort, an IC can expect challenges from project personnel, department managers, or organization executives. This spectrum of potential challenges reinforces the necessity of having a solid implementation plan that addresses the broadest array of potential obstacles to implementation.

Primary Barriers

The fourth area of study in the analysis, implementation barriers, is directly related to the analysis of implementation difficulty. Respondents were asked to identify the primary barriers that they encountered when implementing new practices. As illustrated in Table 1, the IC and BOA respondents differed in their perspectives on primary barriers. The IC and BOA respondents both provided a strong indication that there were two primary barriers to successful implementation: personnel resources and business benefit. In terms of the former, respondents indicated that the organization is not providing sufficient personnel to oversee and actually implement the new practices. This factor was noted much more by the BOA members than by the IC respondents. Indeed, **the IC respondents indicated that organization executives require a business case for a new practice prior to investing in the implementation process**.

Table 1. Primary Barriers Encountered When Implementing New Practices

Barrier to Implementation	IC Response Rate (percent)	BOA Response Rate (percent)
Lack of personnel resources	48	61
Business benefit from change not well understood	48	46
Reluctance by staff	34	33
"If it's not broken, don't fix it"	34	21
Finding partners in the organization to try the new practice	31	39
Lack of financial resources	24	12
Unwillingness to accept practices developed by others	24	30
Risk aversion	17	0
Management support	14	12
Requirement for ROI measurements	10	21

However, beyond this agreement about these two primary factors, the respondents differed on the importance of most of the remaining factors. The IC respondents identified two additional areas as primary barriers, "staff reluctance" and the "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" attitude. Both of these issues are culture-related and share a common element of reluctance to change. As experienced by the ICs, the culture barrier can be one of the most difficult to overcome. In contrast, the BOA respondents indicated that the difficulty in finding partners in the organization and the reluctance of staff were the next two highest-scoring barriers. However, the differences in perspective on financial resources and risk aversion showed the most significant deviations between the groups' responses. Whereas both the BOA and IC members believe personnel are the critical resource barrier, the IC respondents believe that financial resources are an issue by a 2-to-1 margin over the BOA respondents. Moreover, the IC respondents expressed the view that risk aversion is an issue, with a 17 percent response rate. The BOA respondents did not choose this barrier in any of the surveys. Table 1 lists the remaining barriers identified by the respondents as primary barriers.

An analysis of these results points directly to the role of management and culture in the implementation process. The top-ranked barriers fall into these two categories. **The challenge for ICs is to develop a plan that addresses the personnel component of the organization. It is not the technical challenge of the new practice that presents the greatest challenge to implementation. Rather, it is the marketing to organization leaders and the individuals who will be affected by the new practice that is the key.**

Implementation Support

The fifth area of analysis in the IC study responded to the barriers issue by determining how much IR 166-3, *CII Best Practices Guide: Improving Project Performance*, was being used by the ICs to assist in the implementation process. The questions in this part of the study were to determine whether ICs are aware that implementation support is available and whether they are taking advantage of this support. The

result of this inquiry was based on answers to three questions in the IC survey. The first of these questions asked the IC respondents if they were using IR 166-3. Forty-five percent of the IC respondents indicated their use of the document. This finding was a positive starting point and led to the more specific question of whether the ICs used the Implementation Thermometer to measure new practice implementation. In contrast to the nearly even response seen in the previous question, 67 percent of the respondents reported that they did not use the thermometer. As a follow-up to this question, the survey asked respondents to give the principal reason they did not use IR 166-3 support. In response, the ICs indicated that lack of time was the primary reason for not using this resource.

The analysis indicates a clear connection between use of support materials and the amount of time ICs are given to perform their responsibilities. Specifically, the amount of time the ICs have may be sufficient to introduce a new practice and provide overall management, but it apparently is not enough to go beyond these basic functions to include investigating available support documents. The extension of this analysis is to question how successful the ICs believe they are in achieving the establishment of new practices.

Level of Success

The last focus of the IC study was on the question that was prompted by the issue of the ICs' available time: What level of success do the ICs and the BOA members believe is being achieved in the organization? As illustrated in Figure 10, none of the IC respondents responded to this question with a "Very Effective" rating. Rather, half of the respondents rated themselves as only "Somewhat Effective." The BOA respondents had a very similar evaluation of the effectiveness of the ICs, with 55 percent of the respondents believing that the efforts were somewhat effective. The only significant difference between the two groups was a slightly more negative appraisal by the BOA respondents with 6 percent believing the efforts were not effective.

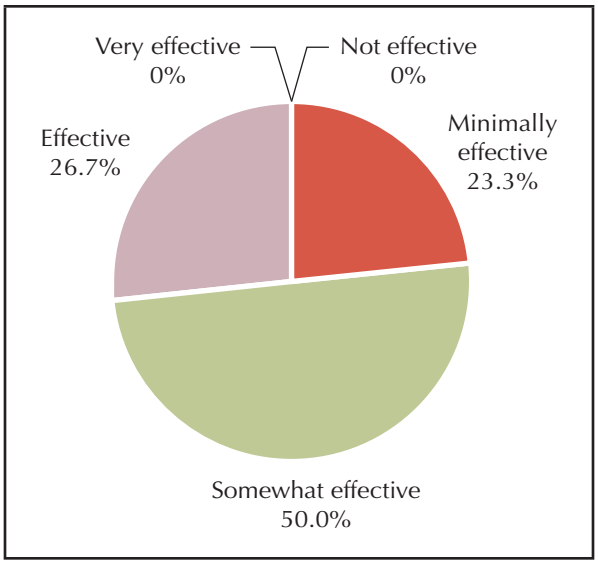

Figure 10. Implementation Effectiveness – IC Perspective

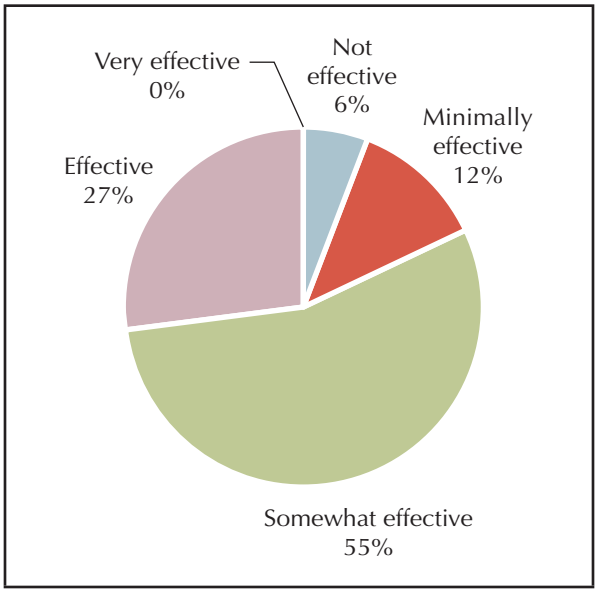

Figure 11. Implementation Effectiveness – BOA Perspective

Pursuing the issue of effectiveness, the survey also queried the respondents about whether their organization had a measurement to evaluate the new practices implemented in the organization. By an overwhelming margin of 94 percent to 6 percent, the IC respondents indicated that no such measurement was in place. The BOA respondents were more positive, with 77 percent indicating that there was no such measurement, and 23 percent indicating that there was. This response still overwhelmingly affirmed the IC perspective on the lack of measurements for success.

The analysis of this last section emphasizes the need for measurements and benchmarks in the implementation process. Measurements as defined by the individual organization are required to monitor and evaluate the impact of new practices. The lack of these measurements results in the unsettled response by the ICs and BOA members in terms of effectiveness. Measurements and benchmarks are required to let individuals at every level of the organization understand the results of both current and past efforts.

3
Analysis

The IC Support Survey identified several key points of concern for long-term implementation success among CII member organizations and future member organizations. As documented in IR 246-2, a key element to success is management support both at the initial implementation planning stage and in the wider expansion and establishing steps. In all of these project phases, management support in terms of both resources and commitment is essential for demonstrating to the IC and the larger organization that the organization supports implementation success. The results from the current study bring into question the active support that is actually being provided to the IC effort.

As outlined in the data analysis section, the survey found that respondents

- had little designated time to perform IC tasks,
- believed that minimal support was provided by management for new practice implementation,
- enjoyed little visibility for implementation efforts,
- encountered difficulties at various organizational levels during the implementation effort,
- encountered barriers that were primarily cultural and organizational rather than technical, and
- believed they were only moderately effective in their IC responsibilities.

These findings indicate that a significant potential exists to increase the effectiveness of new practice implementation through greater IC support. However, new practice implementation is inherently a challenge to organization management since it introduces change into the organizational environment. Therefore, enhancing implementation success by enhancing IC support should be addressed as a change to

organizational policy rather than as a change to organizational processes. Recommendations for achieving this change in terms of an IC support context are as follows:

- **Establish Success Metrics** – The difficulty in introducing change into an organizational environment is that of developing a rationale or business case for making change. The current study reported that most organizations do not use measurements to gauge the success of implementation efforts. The introduction of such metrics should be a priority for ICs. If these metrics are put in place, then an IC will have a stronger justification of implementation efforts. Thus these metrics will help ICs build a business case for resource allocation.

- **Establish Implementation Plans** – Communication is a key element in a successful implementation effort. Communication allows individuals at all levels of the organization to understand the ramifications of a new practice and to understand how the new practice may affect them. Therefore, ICs should focus on establishing standardized implementation plans from which the effort can be communicated and marketed throughout the organization.

- **Build Implementation Communities** – The role of an IC can be daunting when a single individual is given the responsibility of introducing a new practice with little or no formal assistance. To meet this challenge, ICs should develop implementation communities in which individuals throughout the organization are included informally in the IC process. The advantage of this kind of community is that ICs will have a built-in network of key individuals who can support the effort and provide feedback on implementation progress. Typically referred to as "communities of practice," these informal networks have proven to be a key element in the organizational change process.

Defining Implementation Roles

While the recommendations listed above focus on support for the IC, an additional broader recommendation emerges from the current study: organizations need to appropriately and comprehensively define implementation roles. Although ICs can be effective agents of change and marketing within an organization, the responsibilities of an IC can quickly outgrow the capacity of a single individual. When this expansion of responsibilities occurs without the accompanying increase of resources needed for it, the potential for implementation success is quickly reduced. **Therefore, a key task for an organization is to define the implementation roles that are appropriate for the practice that is being implemented. The intent of this exercise is to establish reasonable expectations for the IC and to obtain management commitment to providing additional resources when necessary.**

Although each organization will identify roles that are specific to individual requirements, a general set of roles are required to support successful implementation. Beginning at the top level of the implementation support structure and working down through the organization, the following roles need to be fulfilled.

- **Senior Executive Support** – Any organization focusing on improvement and long-term success needs an individual in a senior management position to communicate the vision for engaging in a new practice implementation. Within CII, this individual is often the Board of Advisors representative. However, the key to this position lies not in the title, but rather in the ability to set and enforce policy in the organization.

- **Executive Champion** – Although an IC is responsible for guiding a new practice through the implementation process, he or she needs management support to provide resources as well as management commitment to succeed. Therefore, an individual in an upper management role must be assigned the responsibility of overseeing and championing new implementation efforts from a management perspective. This

individual is critical to the success of the process because he or she controls the budget, personnel, and communications links required to promote, foster, and deliver a new implementation effort.

- **Implementation Champion(s)** – The role of Implementation Champion (IC) is the centerpiece of the implementation process. This individual is responsible for being the primary contact and organizer of the implementation effort. The mistake that is often made by organizations is to believe that a single individual can oversee all of the implementation efforts being undertaken. In reality, it will often take several individuals working together to oversee the diverse set of new practices being considered. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that an organization consider appointing several subject area experts as ICs; these knowledgeable ICs can oversee implementation efforts related to their respective areas of expertise.

- **Implementation Analyst(s)** – The role of measurement is crucial to successful implementation efforts. Developing and continuously updating these measurements both require that data be collected and disseminated to the ICs. This responsibility should be centralized with an individual or individuals who collect data from the current implementation efforts. It may not be their responsibility to analyze the data, but it is their responsibility to retain the data for current and future measurements.

The number of individuals required to fill these roles may vary from organization to organization. However, it is critical that these functions be fulfilled.

The recommendations offered here represent only a few of the possible ways an organization can enhance IC support. Each organization will have individual opportunities for enhancing IC support. **However, the common themes that have emerged from this study indicate that greater support is required in almost every organization. Specifically, organizations need to make a concentrated effort to increase the time available for IC tasks. They also need to provide greater organizational and resource support. Finally, these efforts must be followed with implementation metrics to measure success.**

4
Conclusion

The ability of an IC to successfully implement a new practice in an organization is directly affected by the level of support provided by management and the organization as a whole. ICs are change agents in an organization, and as such are open to both praise for accomplishments and criticism for attempting to change long-standing practices. However, the successful implementation of a new practice is imperiled when management and the organization fail to provide the IC with the tools, resources, commitment, and well-defined metrics he or she needs to succeed.

The current study demonstrates that the CII IC and BOA member population believes this critical support is not being provided consistently across implementation efforts. This inconsistency hinders organizations from achieving their improvement goals through new practice implementation. Developing a consistent focus on success needs to be the priority of all organizations.

The recommendations in this document are a starting point from which to approach changing the current level of IC support. However, none of these recommendations will provide a benefit unless an organization recognizes the importance of successful implementation efforts. The combination of this recognition with a focused effort to implement the recommended actions is a first step toward the implementation path introduced in IR 246-2.

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