

Keeping pace with a changing world

Five steps to help constructors



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Change requires us to move from a realm of comfort to embracing the unknown.

We often hear construction companies say they have a hard time instituting needed changes. One good example: although most companies agree that field documentation is critical, many organizations don't do it adequately. Why do organizations struggle to implement such changes, changes that would be beneficial? Maybe they are trying to change *actions* rather than *behavior*, in other words, treating the symptoms rather than curing the disease.

It is important to understand that change is difficult. Change requires us to move from a realm of comfort to embracing the unknown. Human nature is to avoid change in favor of the status quo, even when the current situation is less than ideal.

How can change be facilitated? Begin with a simple process of action steps:

Communicate: The first step in that is communication. Communicate why the change is needed and demonstrate how it will benefit each individual and the organization. This is essential. Understand that change requires participation and buy in within the organization is important. It will be far more effective to engage individuals in the change process rather than to dictate the process to them.

So, for instance, demanding that field personnel maintain accurate documentation is not good enough. They need to know why it is important and how it can help the project. Explain that helps to avoid potential dis-



putes or to resolve them before they impact the project, not to mention the fact that proper documentation is critical in making sure everyone is on the same page.

Implement: Don't try to change the entire organization at once. Begin with a change strategy that will be relatively easy to implement. Execute the change on a small scale to set an example. This will introduce the change and establish a foundation on which to build. Then develop action steps that will gradually expand the scope of change as the process is accepted and embraced.

In our example, although there may be a number of areas of docu-

mentation that need improvement, it is best to pick one that can be easily rectified. In this case, it might be to maintain an accurate daily log for the project. Once this is done satisfactorily and is occurring consistently, address another area.

Reinforce: Show that the organization is committed to the change process. Reinforce and celebrate desired behaviors so each individual

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contributing to the change process knows what is expected and what will be rewarded. People will naturally become engaged in the process and soon will see improvement related to their contribution.

In the case of our example, the persons that are keeping the daily logs in good order should be recognized during meetings, rewarded, or used as an example of how to do things.

Accountability: Empower people to initiate beneficial change and hold employees accountable for their participation. Nurture an environment of continuous improvement and support the process at all levels. Every employee should be held accountable and recognized for his or her contribution to the change process.

People need to understand that making the needed changes is expected. This may mean making hard decisions if a person is not willing to embrace the change, but if the reason for the change was communicated effectively originally, most people will be

willing to try their best to achieve the change.

Measure: Finally, establish a metric. In order to know how the change process is going, determine benchmarks for success. Use these to evaluate the change process, and then commend improved performance and progress. This will convey to the employees that the results from changes implemented have been successful and will continue as a part of the company's culture.

In the case of maintaining good daily logs, make sure that they occur every day, contain accurate and useful information on the day's activities, and point out areas of concern and or potential problems. This information should be readily available and periodically checked, preferably by an objective third party.

In summary:

- Communicate to the entire company
- Implement change on a small scale
- Reinforce the desired behavior

■ Hold employees accountable for participating

■ Measure the results

Change is inevitable. It should be encouraged and embraced. Successful outcomes, marked improvement and progress will be the result. Recognize that the change process isn't easy and comfortable for everyone. Stakeholders should understand that the goals and objectives of the organization will be successful from implementing the action steps. Sustained improvement may be difficult but not impossible. It requires collaboration, commitment, patience and leadership but the will result in a change in the organization's culture! **BXM**

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