Why IT Governance Implementation Efforts Fail

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If done well, implementing IT governance in an organization brings with it transformational change. It isn't about driving toward an end-state, i.e., completing a project or program, but rather it's about driving toward a new ongoing steady-state. As such, IT governance implementations fail for many of the same reasons that other transformational change efforts fail. Here are my top six reasons.

Error #1: Lack of a shared understanding and vision. People in the organization must share a common understanding of what IT governance is and what the benefits are. Focus more on Why and less on How. Create a picture of the future that is easy to communicate and appeals to stakeholders. Build the business case; be clear about the business drivers and gain agreement from a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including business partners, that improvement is necessary. Identify clear and measurable goals/objectives for the IT governance effort. Build a common understanding of what is already in place; the gap may not be as big as it seems at first look.

Error #2: Lack of real executive support and continued involvement. At best, you will only be partially successful without executive sponsorship, support and leadership. Understand and deal with resistance. Don't let leaders just SAY that they support the effort, help them understand their role and what is expected of them. Stay on message and constantly, constantly, repeat it.

Error #3: Failure to take the corporate culture into account. Understanding the organization's culture...and simply recognizing that it will impact your IT governance effort...will help tremendously. Because cultures are different, an approach that works in one organization may not work in another.

Error #4: Failure to consider other change efforts the organization is going through. People, especially IT people, know that change happens. But be sensitive to other activities that might be introducing change for the same group of people at the same time. Build the appetite for change by working with stakeholders to get their buy-in, and when necessary, improve the business case and vision statement for what the future will bring to those who get mobilized behind it. Address resistance to change. A converted resistor will often turn out to be your most ardent champion.

Error #5: Underestimating the level of effort to reach "steady-state". It will take time to build strong IT governance in the organization. Introduce the concepts and activities as the appetite and capacity for change allows. Don't try to do everything at once. Focus on the areas that can reduce the pain points, and are best aligned with the most pressing business goals and objectives. Take it in digestible chunks, but keep in mind the ultimate long-term vision.

Error #6: Forgetting to check on, and celebrate, the progress being made. If we don't periodically check progress against the measures we created at the outset of the effort, how do we know if we are making progress toward meeting our goals and objectives. How do we know that we are successful? Some industry-accepted practices contain suggested measures that you can build upon. But they need to provide the insight that your leaders need to make decisions. Don't be fooled into thinking that if one measure is good, then two or three will be better. Just the opposite is true. But for that one measure to stand in place of two or three or more, a good deal of thought needs to be put into it. And finally, having measures in place does no good if they aren't analyzed and used to drive decision-making.