



As usual, the post-Super Bowl "Monday morning quarterbacking" has been robust this year... "How could the Seahawks have called that play...?" "Why did they waste their time outs...?" etc.

Of course "Monday morning quarterbacking" is not confined to the world of football! In fact, Project Managers, Leaders and other members of the workforce frequently look back at failed or semi-successful Continuous Improvement projects with critiques galore about what could have or should have been done. Fortunately, as this newsletter will explain, there is a *Success Predictor* tool that can help you identify the characteristics that are most necessary for an improvement project's success on "Sunday!"

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Success Predictor

by: Sheila Julien, Senior Associate

I should have known better.

But it was *so easy* to improve this process! Everyone could see that a simple change would improve efficiency, visibility to the work, and quality.

Here's the situation: I was working with the management team of an organization in a highly regulated industry in which two departments kept track of what must be delivered by other departments and by when. These two departments provided "Deliverable-due Lists" every month:

- an audit action item tracking list,
- a list of policies due for the annual update and Board approval,
- fifty or sixty different annual risk assessments that had to be performed,
- regulatory compliance action items, and
- internally identified lists of weaknesses to correct

Each of these Deliverable-due Lists was on a different spreadsheet, with a different format, different sequence of columns, minor variations in terminology, and some had a few additional fields that the others did not. But they were all communicating the same thing to the same group of managers: *who* was responsible for *what*, *when*, and what the *current status* was. The managers would search through each of the lists to find their deliverables and copy them to their own lists to keep track of what was due soon.

Someone asked if there was a way to consolidate all the lists, so instead of checking eight or ten different lists for his items, he could get one list that could be filtered for his name and sorted by due date. This would provide clarity about what to work on first and reduce the chance of overlooking an item. One simple solution was to consolidate the information into one spreadsheet that would produce:

- pivot reports by person, so everyone would have their own consolidated to-do list, and



- pivot reports by topic so the Risk and Compliance functions could report progress on types of responsibility

As an added bonus, it could easily create the management dashboards that the Board was looking for to track execution of the entire program.

With enthusiasm from most and tepid agreement from one important constituent, a resource was identified and the conversion/consolidation process begun. The project had to be done quickly – at the end of one cycle and before the start of the next. Within a week the consolidation was complete and all deliverables due could be managed from one list with easy-to-use features.

However, that one important manager was not on board. Consequently, while the management team used the new list to track their responsibilities and update the status – the manager who was NOT on board simply continued with the old system and manually copied updates made to the new list into the old spreadsheets. You know where this is going: double entry, quality issues, reconciling lists, etc. etc. While fewer action items were overdue, in no way could this improvement be considered a success.

This newsletter has often pointed out the importance of choosing the right things to work on. (Bill Conway would say, “You’ve got to do two things, work on the right things and work on them the right way. And the first is much more important than the second!”). We’ve discussed identifying and quantifying waste, selecting a focused scope with near term deliverables. But sometimes, even if the waste is obvious and the improvement is so clear and easy you could reach out and pluck it off the tree, other factors will determine your chances of success. Spotting those in advance will help you avoid wasting your organization’s time on projects that have a low likelihood of lasting success.

This was just such a project, and if I had remembered to check the Conway Success Predictor, we never would have bothered.

The Conway Success Predictor was developed a few years ago by the Conway team of improvement coaches and distills a century or two of collective experience with what characteristics are most necessary for an improvement project’s success. This wisdom was built into a fun little spreadsheet tool that can help predict your project’s “fortune” after asking you to rate the project, on a scale of one to ten, relative to eleven key criteria. Three of these criteria are show-stoppers. (The project described above violated two of those three!) Playing around with the Success Predictor (unfortunately after its fate had become frustratingly clear), it gave me this prediction:

Trouble ahead! While you have some success factors in place, you have weakness in one or more of the most critical success factors which could derail your project! Pay close attention to the recommendations below - especially those marked in red.

In a nut shell, the following eleven factors can predict with a fair degree of accuracy how likely your project is to succeed.



- A. The potential benefit of the project to the organization is clear, substantial and quantifiable. (10 = very clear, quantifiable, substantial)
- B. The problem to be solved is clearly defined and quantifiable, and the project scope is focused and well-defined. (10 = very clear, focused, and well-defined)
- C. The project has top management's commitment and support (resources, sponsorship and follow-up); no influential person is actively opposed to the project. (10 = very strong support)
- D. The sponsor and team leader are clear about each one's role and partner effectively to ensure the success of the project. (10 = very clear)
- E. The team leader and key resources are devoting enough of their time to the project to complete it very quickly. (10= full time)
- F. The team is staffed and led by the right people for the job, and they are determined and capable to quickly achieve results. (10 = very determined and capable)
- G. Meaningful and accurate facts and data about the process are available. (10 = very available)
- H. The process to be improved is repeated frequently enough to efficiently study variation in the current process and to test and measure improvements. Hourly? Monthly? Annually? (10 = very frequently).
- I. The processes to be improved are within the team's span of control. (10 = under control).
- J. The expected timeframe for completion of the project or for achieving concrete and measurable milestones. (10 = 4-8 weeks to completion or measurable milestone)
- K. The processes are stable, that is not undergoing very recent or imminent major change (10 = very stable).

A successful project certainly does not need to score 10s in all of these, and some of these eleven are more important than others and carry more weight in the prediction. Based on your assessment of the situation, this tool will predict your overall likelihood of success and produce some suggested steps you could take at the outset to increase your likelihood of success.

Every organization has more processes with opportunity to improve than they have organizational capacity and management attention units to execute. Careful consideration of each of these eleven factors will help you focus your capacity on those improvements with the best chance of long term success, moving your organization further faster down that never-ending road of Continuous Improvement.

If you think this might be a useful item to have in your toolbox, contact Conway Management to get access to the Project Success Predictor.