Implementation Pitfalls

It's a platitude that a good concept certainly is only half the way to a successful improvement. Only implemented improvements really are improvements that score. Numerous are the more or less detailed findings and concepts regarding the obstacles for a successful implementation. Obviously, it's also a self-referential problem: how to implement concepts for avoiding implementation pitfalls?

In our consulting practice, we have compiled a small set of guidelines whose observance increases the probability of implementation pragmatically and effectively. Those guidelines focus on the management level of persons responsible for production, plant managers, site managers or service managers. These are decisive for our main field of work, operations.

The "Complete Concept Pitfall"

Guideline: implementation of an optimisation concept will not become easier or more probable if the concept is "complete".

Optimisation concepts are not like assets, plannings or technical projects, which need to be as complete as possible in order to be safe, reliable, and of high quality.

In many cases, optimisation concepts are work processes, and their implementation essentially means achieving a behaviour modification (internal or external), which cannot reliably be achieved by rolling out a "complete concept" (= detailed, aligned, tested).

Therefore, it's better to bring concepts to the users early ("incomplete", 80/20 etc.) and to gather feedback. "Friction" at an early stage drives the behaviour modification.

Implementation should focus on a process for improving the concept and a prioritisation of further concept elaboration according to the users' requirements.

Obviously, this approach preserves resources, even only by limiting and prioritising the effort for "the last 10%". First and foremost, it creates the chance of quick successes by applying the concept, which, as the case may be, is still incomplete, yet already effective.

The „Task Force Rollout Pitfall"

Guideline: the whole organisation's change, which is necessary for optimising work processes, will not be achieved by a task force rollout structure.

Elaboration of the optimisation measure is allocated to a task force without sufficient integration of users. This task force is formed as a working team composed of some representatives of the own organisation and some participants of other functions as well as customers. The first management level is then charged with the "implementation in day-to-day business (or in the line, respectively)", or working teams with some representatives of other functions and customers are commissioned to do that.

Obviously, this leads to a "concept from the outside"; the probability of implementation is strongly dependent on the resources, the understanding, and the ability of interpretation of the line management.

The measures to avoid the "complete concept pitfall" already relieve this problem. Better still, a "pilot group" may be set up to handle the issue. This means a group which represents a cross-section of the user system, containing a significant number of e.g. supervisors and shop-floor workers. This approach has to be supplemented by feedback in large group events, with a substantial part of the organisation as participants and the pilot group as organiser and host (equal to equal).

The „Flexible Standard Pitfall"

Guideline: trying to roll out a standard that is factually optimal does not increase the probability to establish a solution which is actually close to that standard.

When optimising work processes, standardisation is a good thing, massively improving efficiency and lowering complexity. In any specific case of the application of the work process, conversely, especially with processes spanning organisational interfaces, the specific user always has legitimate demands for flexibility regarding adaptations to his specific needs.

The mandatory consequence is a discussion on the introduction of the standard. This discussion is biased, because the user has to "fight for" variations, up to his refusal of implementation. In the end, because of various individual flexibilizations, you'll find yourself far from the actual standard and in the face of extensive complexity.
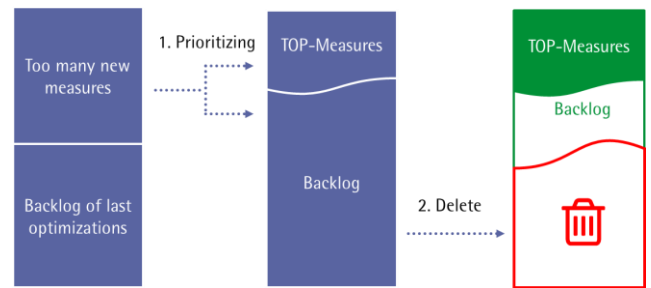
It's better to develop a few variations from the standard in advance, leaving the choice of the variation to be implemented and the course of action to the user, as free and uninfluenced as possible. The focus then shifts to the consequent compliance with that variation in day-to-day business.

The „Prioritising Without Deleting Pitfall"

Guideline: prioritising without deleting is counterproductive.

If you choose to pick just one guideline, this shall be it. Prioritising is important and decisive for every implementation. Caught in this pitfall, prioritising usually follows the subsequent pattern: firstly, measures with top priority are chosen for immediate processing; then, the rest is relegated to the topic backlog ("parking lot").

Topic backlogs are not only useless deadweight, they are dangerous. A topic caught in the backlog is not yet gone. It's supposed to be done and shall be treated eventually. As a burden for upcoming measures, it takes up resources. It's a proof that not everything can be implemented anyway.

The second step of prioritisation therefore is crucial: cutting the topic backlog. This consists of two parts: at the one hand, delete the "bottom" measures, which will not be taken over to the topic backlog at all. On the other hand, cut the measures which already are present in the topic backlog. The 80/20 rule applies to both steps: 80% should just be delete

About 3con Management Consultants

3con specialises on operations management and transformation in process industries. We aid our clients in achieving sustainable commercial success by means of optimal use of their operational resources. Besides developing concepts, our focus lies on operationalising optimisation concepts down to shop-floor level.

The preceding compilation is intended to be an application of itself. Surely, there are many more exciting and promising concepts to avoid implementation pitfalls. If you like to, we shall discuss the subject. Visit our website www.3con-consultants.de or contact us via info@3con-consultants.de.