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How to avoid wasting your investment in organisational initiatives

By Jenni Murphy-Scanlon

Why is it that we spend so many resources developing important procedures, interventions and initiatives but fail to maintain them? The next emergency or fad comes along and we move our focus to that, forgetting all about the important work we have invested in, that now needs to be maintained.

I think there are some key reasons for this phenomenon:

We work and run our businesses in a complex and information-rich world. It is almost impossible to deal with all the information available to us. So we tend to react to the information that seems most vital at the time, and once no longer apparently vital, we seem to not have the time or resources to keep dedicating to it.

In larger organisations, the people responsible for initiatives move on to other roles or organisations, and somehow the next person in the role does not have the same passion for, or understanding of, their predecessor's work. Or perhaps there is more career kudos in developing something new rather than maintaining and keeping relevant the initiatives already invested in.

Financial reporting in most organisations still focuses on an annual cycle. The return on investment for a range of human resources, marketing and business initiatives has a much longer timeframe. Once the money has been invested and we enter the next financial year, there is little focus on the return on investment from previous years' spending.

Whether yours is a small or large organisation there are some actions you can take to avoid wasting the investments you make in organisational initiatives:

- Keep one master list of significant initiatives you have developed and/or implemented and review these at Board, Senior Executive or Owner level monthly. Ensure for each initiative that a specific role is responsible for maintaining and updating these, and have the person holding that role prepare a brief report and be available for questions. This keeps everyone focussed on continuing the initiatives, and continuing to examine the benefits from them. If the organisation restructures, ensure that there is still a role holding responsibility for the maintenance and review of each initiative.



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- Consider treating the costs of developing these initiatives as investments or assets in your internal (not tax) accounts, and estimate quarterly the likely return you are getting on that investment. If you are considering a replacement initiative, you need to justify that, a little like purchasing new office furniture - would you do that if you already had perfectly good furniture that just needed a clean?
- Give as much reward, feedback and kudos to the people who effectively maintain, update and develop existing initiatives as you do to the people who create and develop new initiatives (maybe more!).
- Ensure that manager and senior staff induction includes overviews of these significant initiatives and that new recruits are clear about the expectations of them participating in and maintaining these. Provide coaching for the first period on-the-job in these initiatives to ensure new managers and senior staff are fully competent in them.
- Remember that just because something is new or faddish, it doesn't make it better than what you already have. A good initiative, well implemented and used over time, will generally give much better return than several "ra-ra" initiatives that are not properly implemented and soon forgotten.



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