



Construction Industry Institute®

From Vision to Action:
Igniting the Passion and Imagination of an
Organization to Introduce Positive Change

Construction Industry Institute

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**From Vision to Action:
Igniting the Passion and Imagination of an Organization
to Introduce Positive Change**

**Prepared by
Construction Industry Institute
Implementation Research Team IS 31, Vision to Action**

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Executive Summary

Continuous improvement is the essential component of long-term success. Whether viewed as promoting innovation, progress, or a competitive edge, the introduction of new ideas creates a sustainable advantage for engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) organizations. However, to achieve success, organizations must recognize that introducing new ideas requires the stimulation of interest and curiosity within the organization. Maintaining this motivation throughout the process of implementing such innovations is critical to continuous improvement. The continuing challenge for organizations is to inspire, foster, and expand the passion for innovation and new practices throughout this process.

Having conducted a literature search, a survey, structured interviews, and a series of case studies, CII IS 31, Vision to Action Implementation Research Team found empirical evidence of a gap between the initial step of establishing a vision for new practices and the overall implementation process. These findings prompted the development of two implementation resources: 1) Implementation Strategy (IS) 31-2, *The Implementation Process Action Tool: Igniting the Passion and Imagination of an Organization to Introduce Positive Change*, a guide that provides a qualitative and a quantitative foundation for moving from vision to action; and 2) IS 31-3, *The Vision to Action Hot List*, a laminated reference for motivating executive management to consider new ideas and then act on them.

The journey across the vision to action gap requires organizations to take the following seven steps:

1. **Preparing to Cross** – Focus on management buy-in and the development of the appropriate vision for implementation.
2. **Getting on the Bridge** – Establish metrics and statements of necessity to ensure the organization's understanding of why the implementation is needed and how it will be evaluated.

3. **Starting the Journey** – Ensure that a team is in place to guide the implementation and to gather resources to support the implementation.
4. **Checking the Supports** – Determine whether the appropriate cultural, managerial, and technical support is in place for a successful implementation.
5. **The Main Crossing** – Ensure that the organization has a defined plan and roadmap for completing the implementation effort.
6. **Addressing the Barriers** – Determine whether the implementation will encounter common barriers and if the team is prepared to address these barriers.
7. **Exiting to Action** – Ensure that the organization can communicate what it has done, how it will build on this action, and why the new practice is important to the organization.

The first challenge for anyone seeking to improve existing paradigms within EPC organizations is to capture the imagination of executives, and the IS 31 team developed the short-form “Hot List” resource for this purpose. Once upper-level management has committed to the new practice or innovation, the champion should then use the IMPACT tool to assess commitment to implementation and continuous improvement. Ultimately, organizations must determine whether they are willing to put the resources and management support behind the continuous improvement opportunities presented by innovative ideas.

Introduction

This research addresses the essential question of how to ignite the passion and imagination of an organization to introduce positive change. The introduction of research into an organization unfolds in three stages: 1) vision, 2) evaluation, and 3) action. The CII knowledge base addresses the importance and the challenges of both the vision phase and the actual implementation of a new practice. Similarly, in its other implementation guidance documents, the Implementation Strategy Committee addresses the development of implementation plans that incorporate evaluation and action protocols. However, the implementation process cannot be undertaken without a commitment to taking new ideas from vision statement to actionable goal. Successfully navigating this transition continues to be a challenge for many organizations, since the initial passion for innovation and new practices often fades with the emergence of barriers and project realities.

The ISC team undertook the Vision to Action research effort in response to the need for guidance on how to generate and foster the passion and imagination needed to bridge the gap between setting a vision for implementation and achieving implementation success. The goal of this effort is to give CII members a method not only to inspire their organizations, but also to help them retain the motivation to bridge that gap. Having such a formal process provides the following benefits:

- Organizations can determine whether they are prepared to foster motivation throughout a new practice implementation.
- Organizations can better prepare to implement essential innovations and advances.
- Organizations can understand the key factors that drive successful implementations.

The main challenge to the vision to action process is that organizations are not monolithic entities, but rather groups of individual “colonies” that collaborate to achieve common goals. This practical understanding of their structure challenges the classic CII model of implementation, which designates a single individual—the Implementation Champion (IC)—as the transfer point in the implementation process. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly evident that this perspective no longer uniformly reflects how innovation and new practices actually enter EPC organizations. Rather, the vision to action process is heavily influenced by organizational norms, the level of autonomy that project managers have in an organization, and the geographic scope of the organization. This variability and the need to adapt vision to action processes to individual needs motivated the current research effort.

The findings of the CII Vision to Action research effort, the IMPACT tool, and the Vision to Action Hot List give organizations a step-by-step approach to encouraging greater efforts at moving from vision to implementation. However, these research products are only a piece of the overall implementation assistance that CII provides. They are designed to help individuals inspire their organizations to embrace CII practices before initiating the full implementation process. (See Figure 1.) The IS 31 materials provide the knowledge required to bridge the gap between the initial recognition of and excitement about the continuous improvement opportunities and the structured effort required for implementation success.

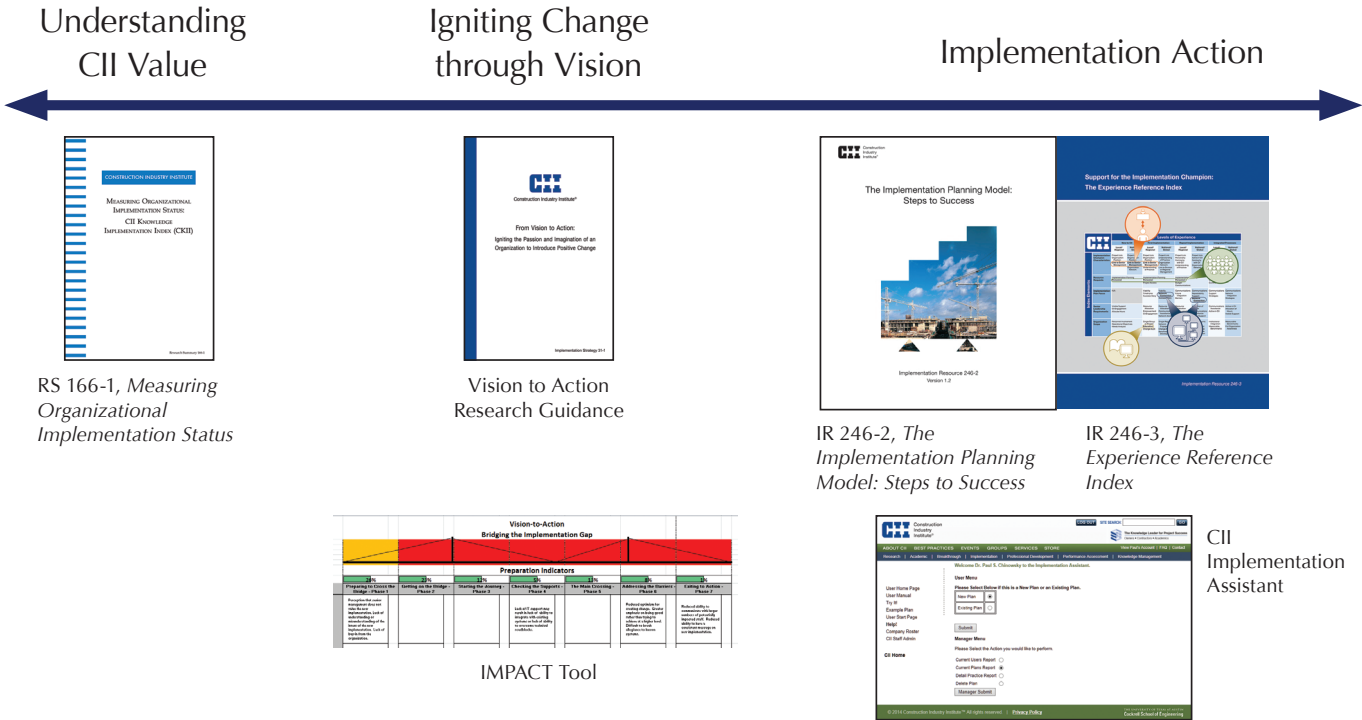


Figure 1. The Vision to Action research bridges the knowledge gap between establishing a vision of a new practice to actively implementing it.

Literature Review

In contrast to the manufacturing industries that fabricate a large number of units (e.g., automobiles or personal computers), the engineering-construction industry is generally focused on the production of a single and unique end product. Completion of these unique projects is achieved through what is termed the “project format” (Halpin and Woodhead 1998). In this format, management focuses on the planning and control of resources within the framework of the project. While construction professionals give significant consideration to project management topics, they pay less attention to strategic management. (Strategic management addresses the challenges of operating an entire organization, as opposed to individual projects.) Because they often place more emphasis on project-based or short-term objectives than on long-term or strategic goals, this general lack of strategic management directly affects the successful implementation of new initiatives.

Just as strategic concepts do not usually develop spontaneously, the existence of a strategic management environment does not guarantee that organization members will focus on developing strategic concepts. To encourage this focus, numerous academic and business writers have proposed various strategic planning models (Thompson and Brooks 1997; Lemmon and Early 1996; Davis 1987; Mintzberg 1994; McCabe and Narayanan 1991). These strategic planning models provide instructions for approaching, executing, and evaluating the development of strategic concepts. Yet as with any topic that focuses on procedural processes, the number of strategic planning methods is increasing at a seemingly exponential rate. Research in this area can be divided along three lines: 1) implementation frameworks, 2) implementation guidance, and 3) metric development.

Implementation Frameworks

Arguably, the most prolific area of research and consulting guidance in the vision to action area is in the development of strategic or implementation frameworks. In both research and consulting efforts, the development of general, widely applicable models is a common goal. Creating frameworks that are both generic enough for any organization to adopt, yet specific enough to convey a focused message, is the central challenge of this work. To this end, researchers prefer to develop a graphical representation of the frameworks they propose. For example, Dwyer's Ease of Doing/Impact on Goal matrix provides four quadrants in which to group proposed efforts according to the difficulty of their implementation and their impact on long-term goals (Dwyer 2012). Gratton takes a similar approach in proposing a risk-based matrix to define strategic impact and alignment (Gratton 1996). Additional examples include the following: Whitlock's Strategic Structure Tree, which provides a hierarchical perspective on setting goals that are achievable through specific actions; and the Strategic Intent approach developed by Mezger and Violani, which focuses on putting practical meaning to a vision (Whitlock 2003; Mezger and Violani 2010).

Another example in this area, the Logical Framework Matrix by Schmidt, brings a set of structured queries on organizational assumptions into a graphical framework perspective (Schmidt 2008). This consulting-based approach is an extension of the original research introduced by Kaplan and Norton on the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), which developed a set of structured responses to the four areas of finance, customers, learning, and internal processes (Kaplan and Norton 1996). Although subsequent research investigated how the BSC can be used to focus strategic actions, extending this approach to simplified matrices can bring strategic focus to members of the broader business community.

Implementation Guidance

The area of implementation research that emphasizes implementation guidance focuses less on developing overall frameworks than on providing sets of questions that can be used to guide implementation

efforts. This work is also characterized by efforts in both the consulting and academic domains. An example of it in the academic domain is the Meaning-Making approach, which combines social psychology research with strategic management research, to develop relationships between objectives and actions in groups of employees (Sonenshein and Dholakia 2012). Management can rely on this approach since the underlying studies have demonstrated its effectiveness for strategic implementation.

As with the strategic frameworks, implementation guidance gains widespread acceptance when it moves from the purely academic domain to the implementation-focused domain of consulting. Numerous efforts have taken this perspective to give organizations general guidance on achieving strategic implementations. Examples of this work include studies by the Boston Consulting Group and Bain and Company (Plascke et al. 2011; Allen et al. 2013). Of note in this area is the significant body of work on Six Sigma approaches to process implementation and strategy. Since many manufacturing and engineering firms base their operations on quantitative and statistical methods, they value the quantitative rigor of the Six Sigma system. The underlying theme of these efforts is the need for organizations to balance objectively the difficulty of achieving strategic objectives against the impact of achieving implementation goals.

Metric Development

The third primary area of relevance for the current study is metric development. Research in this area focuses on the development of metrics to evaluate the implementation of strategic objectives. Researchers including Eccles, Barskey and Bremser, Kerzner, and Porter emphasize both the necessity and difficulty of developing metrics to create strategic initiatives for long-term competitive advantages (Eccles 1991; Barskey and Bremser 1999; Kerzner 2011; and Porter 2008). The researchers often describe this difficulty in terms of strategic versus transactional objectives and costs, arguing that the development of metrics for strategic objectives lacks the advantage of attributable rents or fees (Liebeskind 1996). Specifically, without the attributable fees associated