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Support for the Implementation Champion: The Experience Reference Index

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**Prepared by
Construction Industry Institute
Implementation Strategy Committee**

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Executive Summary

The requirements for successful implementation of CII practices change as an organization's implementation experience increases. Although the fundamentals of implementation remain constant over time, the specific concerns of an organization will change according to the scope of its implementation efforts and depending on its experience at implementing new practices. This research addresses the question, "How do implementation requirements differ based on experience and the characteristics of the organization?" This research examined the role of an organization's experience with CII practices as an indicator of how its implementation efforts need to change over time. This study is a continuation of the effort of CII Research Team (RT) 246 to develop an implementation methodology.

Using survey data it collected, the research team developed the Experience Reference Index (ERI) to provide a detailed extension of the CII Implementation Planning Model. The ERI recognizes that an organization's implementation concerns will change over time. Specifically, it addresses five key elements affecting implementation success. Each of these key elements has different focal points, depending on the level of experience and the geographic deployment of the organization. Implementers should use the ERI to supplement the development of their implementation plans. Using it will ensure that the appropriate focal points are addressed, depending on the organization's level of implementation experience.

The results of the background survey suggest that differences in implementation concerns change as organizations become more engaged in the implementation of CII practices. Such changes in perspective and findings include the following:

- Experienced implementers reported placing a greater emphasis on obtaining communications assistance to convey the implementation message to their respective organizations.

- Experienced implementers understood the value of the link between the Implementation Champion (IC) and the network of experts in the organization.
- Experienced implementers considered the geographic deployment of an organization to be a primary indicator of which focal points an organization should consider.
- Minimal differences existed between contractors and owners among the population surveyed, in terms of their experience-based needs and their perspectives on the primary factors for implementation success.

Introduction

To continue the ISC mission of supporting CII member organizations and their Implementation Champions (ICs) during the implementation process, the institute sponsored a study to determine how organizations with different levels of CII experience require different kinds of support. The goal was to develop the Experience Reference Index (ERI), a tool with two main uses: 1) it can help organizations determine which focal points they should emphasize during different phases of their CII experience, and 2) it can help new ICs determine the appropriate types of implementation resources for their organizations. (See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the ERI.) The benefits of this research to CII member organizations are as follows:

- Recognize and communicate the different requirements for implementation as the levels of experience change over time.
- Provide guidance for the selection of ICs with the preferred attributes for particular levels of experience.
- Understand the specific changes that should be made in recommended implementation scope for implementation plans, depending on the level of experience.

The ERI is intended to serve as a support element during the initial phase of the implementation planning effort. The ERI is a guidance tool, designed to reflect the impact of experience on the implementation process. The tool is divided into a matrix with four levels of experience across the top. These levels reflect the organization's familiarity with the implementation process. The vertical dimension comprises index elements that reflect the specific areas affected by the levels of experience, e.g., IC characteristics and resource requirements. Finally, the index specifics are the individual focal points within the matrix that require attention as the level of experience increases over time. Together, these components create the ERI matrix, a tool that helps organizations find the best approach to implementation, regardless of experience.

The current study stands as a complement to CII Implementation Resource (IR) 246-2, *Implementation Steps to Success*, as well as to CII Research Summary (RS) 246-1a, *The Role of Executive Support in Implementation Champion Success*. The original IR 246-2 document provided the general blueprint for implementation success. This blueprint was augmented by RS 246-1a, which addressed the critical question of how appropriate support for the IC during the implementation process directly affects the probability of success of the implementation effort. However, each of these documents addressed implementation as a general process. Subsequent discussions with CII members indicated that organizations at different stages of experience implementing CII research findings require different levels of support and focus during their implementation efforts.

This research summary provides the background, the methodology, and the data underlying the ERI, and discusses the findings in terms of the overall implementation process.

Literature Review

The current study builds upon several areas of previous study in the management domain. Of particular relevance is the work in change management. In this regard, the study builds upon the insights of several lines of inquiry to develop the experience-based approach presented in the ERI. The need to enhance an organization's productivity and effectiveness in response to changing environments is a recurring theme in business literature in particular, and in all areas of production in general. As outlined by Collins (2001), the greatest threat to an organization's achievement of greatness is its contentment with being very good at what it does. In the context of new practices, this phenomenon transfers to the greatest threat being an organization's contentment with established practices that have achieved acceptable and above-average results. The prospect of moving from a position of being successful in a specific area or context to one of potentially excelling beyond the competition can be daunting to many organizations. Specifically, the cost-benefit analysis for introducing the disruption into existing processes can be inconclusive, given the unknowns involved in the process. This uncertainty goes against the risk perspective of the capital facility industry in general and leads directly to the desire to proceed with established practices.

The evidence for this reluctance to introduce new practices is well documented in the literature. In general, the literature focuses on the topic of change management. Although change management and new practice implementation have a close relationship, the two topics should not be considered interchangeable. Specifically, the relationship between change management and new practice implementation can be viewed as causal. Initially, an organization encounters a trigger to examine its practices for improvement opportunities. This trigger can be competition, economics, new business opportunities, customer demand, or an internal gap analysis. In each case, this trigger generates an opportunity for improvement through new or improved practices.

Once the opportunity is identified and an implementation path is laid out, the implementation process will result in the need for change. In this manner, the implementation of new or improved practices is the driver for change management. More importantly, implementation of a practice gives a specific context for change management to occur. It also establishes a need for a specific plan to be introduced. This new plan should both manage change and lead to the successful implementation of the new practice.

Given this relationship between new practice implementation and change management, foundational work in the area of change management can be considered as background for the current research. Arguably, the research in this area that had the greatest impact was that of Kotter (1995). Kotter studied organizations to determine why change efforts were unsuccessful and why change efforts encountered barriers that appeared insurmountable. The conclusions of this investigation were that change management and leadership are intertwined, and that successful change management efforts are directly dependent on the capabilities of the person leading the change. Kotter's ideas are reflected in the ERI Index Elements.

A second research effort that is essential to the implementation process was performed by Suchman (1987). In this work, Suchman studied the variance between change plans and actual implementation efforts. The main finding was that change management plans must be used as a guide rather than as a blueprint, and deviations should be expected and actively managed rather than seen as failures. This finding emphasized that both internal and external forces will act upon a change process and, more likely than not, these forces will result in changes occurring throughout the process. These changes should be expected and accommodated rather than viewed as indications of a failure of the plan. This result complements the findings of Mosier et al. (2000), who found that risk is an integral part of change, and the ability to accept that risk will be directly related to the organization's ability to succeed in the overall process.

A third thread in the change management literature that is relevant to the implementation of new processes is the focus on the fact that change affects multiple areas within an organization, and that these effects in turn require a group of individuals to be responsible for the process, rather than a single individual (Yarberry 2005). This recognition will have two beneficial consequences: 1) it should prompt the group of individuals to meet on a regular basis to discuss the change process and any deviations from the original plan that may be necessary; and 2) it should prompt the change management group to anticipate potential barriers that can be recognized early in the process (Rowden 2001).

Finally, change management and new practice implementation owe a significant debt to the work of Peter Senge and the development of a systems approach to organizational change (Senge 1990). Specifically, Senge introduced the concept that a shared vision was critical to the effective communication of the reasons for undertaking organizational transformation. In this shared vision, the organization must understand the imperative need for change, as well as the consequences of not incorporating change into the system. Because the organization is a dynamic system that is in a constant state of environmental response, the introduction of change is not only beneficial, but it is critical to successfully surviving environmental turbulence.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the current study was a survey approach, which was augmented by group interviews conducted at multiple CII events. For the quantitative element of the study, the research team used a Web-based survey to obtain responses from existing ICs and Board of Advisor (BOA) representatives of CII member organizations. Each IC and BOA representative was sent an invitation to participate in the study. The result of the invitations to the ICs was a 42 percent response rate, with 49 responses out of 118 invitations. The response rate of the BOA representatives was 40 percent, with 47 responses out of 118 invitations. (See Table 1.) Out these 96 survey recipients, 26 were both the IC and the BOA representative for their respective organizations. Thus, the study collected surveys from 70 individuals. These survey responses represented 37 owners and 33 contractors, which together made up 59 percent of the CII membership as it stood at the time of the survey. The respondents in both the BOA and IC populations were drawn from both experienced or novice organizations, thus providing the range in perspectives required for the study. The novice ICs and BOA members who were in either the “New to Process” or the “First Implementation” categories were combined into one group. They are referred to as “New Implementers” in the following sections. Similarly, experienced IC and BOA respondents who were rated as being in the “Good Understanding” and “Formalized Processes” categories were combined into another group. They are labeled “Experienced Implementers.”

A limitation of the results presented here is that the survey results are from a convenience sample, since the responses were not intended to be random. Instead, they represent the member community based on the convenience of the available population. This factor, combined with the limited overall population prevents the study from establishing a broad statistical result that is applicable across all groups. However, the results are reflective of CII members at the time the study was completed.

Table 1. Overall characteristics of the survey samples

Attribute	BOA Respondents	IC Respondents	Respondents in Both BOA and IC Roles
Total Respondents	21	23	26
Member Type	Owner: 10 Contractor: 11	Owner: 13 Contractor: 10	Owner: 14 Contractor: 12
Experience Level with CII Implementation	New to Process: 2 First Implementation: 5 Good Understanding: 13 Formalized Processes: 1	New to Process: 9 First Implementation: 4 Good Understanding: 7 Formalized Processes: 3	New to Process: 8 First Implementation: 0 Good Understanding: 13 Formalized Processes: 5

The results of the survey were grouped together to develop answers to the key study questions. The focus of the questions and the summary answers are as follows:

- Which personality traits and skill sets should the IC possess? (See page 19 for details.)
 - an understanding of the practice
 - established networks in the organization
 - personal link to projects are the key characteristics of a successful IC
- Which minimal resources should he or she control? (See page 20 for details.)
 - The implementation planning process and communication resources were considered to be the key elements, according to the Experienced Implementers.
- Which title should the IC hold? Which minimal organizational tenure is optimal? (See page 19 for details.)
 - The position in the organization and length of employment are considerations, but were not reported as being as important as the organizational network in place.
- Should the organization have multiple ICs, a single IC, or no specific IC? What is the consequence of each path?
 - The respondents viewed the IC as being important as a leader. However, they thought that the number of ICs needed is dependent on the number of projects, with the key element being personal links to projects.
- How should the IC communicate about implementation practices and CII activities, within the organization? (See page 21 for details.)
 - Communication remains an area of concern for the respondents and was found to be the weak link in current implementation efforts in RS 246-1a.
 - Organizations need to move away from emphasis on individual communication to a broader enterprise outlook.

- How should Return-on-Investment (ROI) be addressed for a new implementation? (See page 24 for details.)
 - With 87 percent of the respondents indicating that an anticipated ROI is not required for starting an implementation, this issue should not become a barrier to implementation.

The following sections provide answers to these questions in the context of the ERI, based on the data collected from the survey study.