



Sustainable Gain

by Cub Marion

Implementing a solution, and validating it has corrected the problem is quite rewarding for the team and project leader. It feels good. However, sustaining this achievement is often the most overlooked phase of continuous improvement.

After hours of data gathering, meetings, and analysis, it is a welcome change to see the “finish line” of the initiative. Naturally, the team is excited looking to validate that the solution they came up with works. When it does, feelings of accomplishment and relief are typical. Remember, the project is not over. Actually, this is the area of highest risk on the project. With a valid solution, it is now time to transition the project over to the process owner. The process owner is the one who is the sentinel of the process change over the long term. If the process owner does not take complete ownership of this solution, including the diagnostic measures to detect excursions, the probability of sustainable gain is minimal.

To address the possibility of a poor transition, we must go upstream, starting with project scoping. It is imperative that the scope of the project is clearly understood and supported by key stakeholders; namely the champion, process owner, project leader, and team members. Next, during the lifecycle of the project, ensure milestone reviews are conducted to verify alignment. The project leader must be very cognizant of this, and make it a point to repetitively provide situational awareness that at the completion of the project, the solution will be transitioned to the process owner. There should be no surprises. Side note, having the process owner serve as a team member is a good technique for risk mitigation. Once the solution has been validated, clear and concise procedures need to be agreed upon in order to permanently put the solution in place. This includes diagnostics, so not only is the output measured (lagging indicator), in process metrics are established (leading indicators). Sound diagnostics enable detectability of excursions, and timely response to minimize or eliminate any process disruptions.

The development of procedures and diagnostics, meaning the sustainment plan, is the responsibility of the project team. Once developed it is transitioned to the process owner. Again, there should be no surprises here. The process owner should be engaged and supportive of this transition, as he or she was involved every step of the way; from project scoping to implementation.