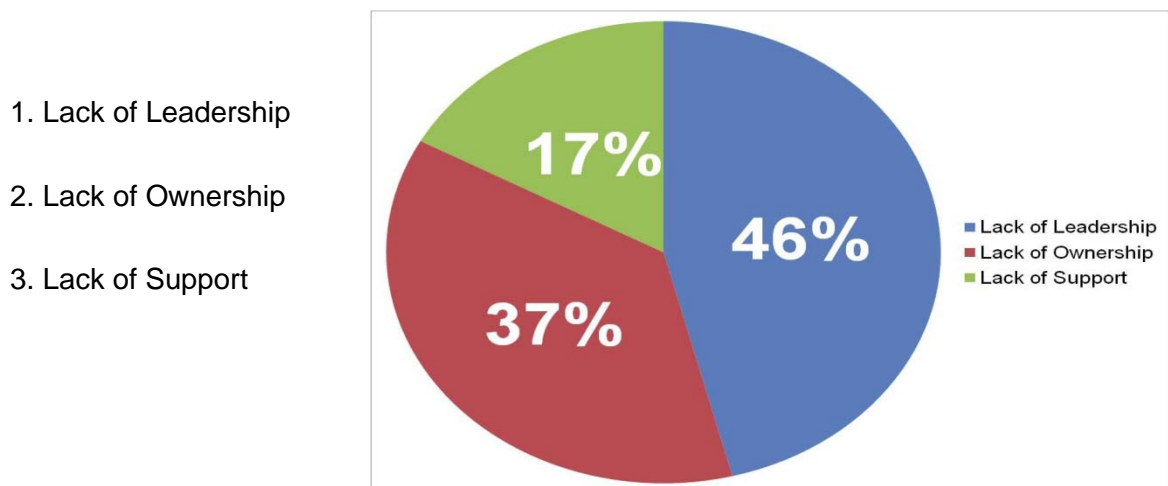


Why Improvement Initiatives Fail

A recent discussion on the Lean Six Sigma LinkedIn group requested members to state their top three reasons continuous improvement initiative fail or lack sustainability. Continuous improvement initiatives could be Lean and/or Six Sigma; there were no specific guidelines. There was, however, an enormous response. With almost 500 comments posted on the discussion, it seems everyone has an opinion on why continuous process improvements fail.

The responses were analyzed by group member, Lutfi Apiliogullari, who identified clear patterns in the responses. Lutfi found that the vast majority of responses fell into three categories:



The largest percent of people, 46%, believed that **Lack of leadership** is the reason improvement initiatives fail. Cultural change is the most important element for the success of an improvement initiative. Effective leaders must paint the vision of what an organization must become and be the driving force to initiate changes. If leaders are not fully engaged, then there are not clear objectives for the initiative. This causes confusion among employees and can lead to resistance, fear of change, or even sabotage.

Lack of ownership involves a lack of buy-in from the management team. Limited knowledge and awareness of those in positions of power can vastly deteriorate and even destroy an improvement initiative. These individuals must have a commitment and involvement with the improvement initiative, or there will be no ownership and no accountability. 37% of people responded that they feel improvement initiatives fail for this reason.

Lack of support was identified by 17% of the respondents and focuses on the shortage of resources and a project structure necessary to support the changes required. The main resources mentioned were time, people, and money. Educating the right people on how to make and implement change is a large part of a continuous improvement program. Another element involved with the lack of support involves the need to build a business case with a clear benefit and cost analysis and then craft a plan that aligns with the objectives outlined in the business case.

Leadership, ownership, and support are clearly vital to the survival and success of an improvement program. Failure in any one of these areas will lead to chaos and doom any program to failure.

While the challenges may seem large, the good news is that the problems are common and our team at Transformance Advisors has coached numerous executives in walking through the continuous improvement minefield. The three main reasons for failure are clearly addressed in our various educational events.

For leaders of lean initiatives, we offer our Lean Leadership seminar, which is designed for executives to learn how to leverage our systematic application of executive sponsorship techniques. We explore how to organize for success, support education, clear obstacles, and focus on critical milestones.

For creating ownership of a lean initiative, we offer our Lean ROI Seminar which teaches how to estimate the benefits and costs of a lean initiative and select an appropriate project which will generate support from all stakeholders.

For lack of support, our Certified Lean Master program is the perfect tool for teaching key individuals how to manage a lean improvement project from start to finish. This program includes education, application, and coaching in a format that requires participants to implement a improvement project while taking the course over a 3 month period.

For further information on any of these courses, please contact me at khickey@emailta.com or visit our website at www.transformanceadvisors.com.