



Partnership to Influence Change in Procurement

By Susan Avery

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Talk to any procurement professional trying to launch a new initiative or collaborate with an internal group to source an indirect spend category and you learn that one of the hardest parts of their job is getting colleagues on board with the project.

Even procurement pros armed with communication skills who work hard to promote their project and the benefits that could result from executing it meet resistance to change and fall short of their goals.



Barbara Ardell, Vice President at Paladin Associates, a sourcing services firm, understands this.

“It can be frustrating and difficult, says Ardell, who has more than 30 years experience in procurement, technology, and training. “Up to 85% of companies fail at change. Data support this.”

She tells *My Purchasing Center* that this doesn't have to be the case. Change is possible, she says, and procurement professionals can be much more successful at managing it to bring value to their organizations.

Recently, Paladin Associates partnered with VitalSmarts, an innovator in corporate training and leadership development, to bring a new service, Influencing Change, to procurement.

A hybrid of training and consulting, Influencing Change consists of a planning session, a workshop that includes skill training and playbook development, and ongoing success checks. Paladin also offers procurement a two-day Influencer training class that can be held independent of a particular project. Ardell has received certification from VitalSmarts to provide the service.

She says Influencing Change is different from traditional change management which centers on strategy, systems, structure and processes, in that it focuses on underlying status quo behaviors that resist organization change.

Using the image of an iceberg to explain, Ardell says, “the Influencing Change methodology really looks below the water line at individual behavior. After all, organization change is really just the sum of individual behavior changes.”

The methodology also looks at vital, or high leverage, behaviors, she says. “Rather than dilute efforts by going after everything, it focuses on the levers that will impact change the most.”

To do that, Influencing Change uses VitalSmarts’s Six Sources of Influence, Ardell says, asking *My Purchasing Center* to picture a two-by-three matrix. Across the top the two columns are motivation and ability. To change behavior, she explains, there are two factors involved: Is the individual motivated to change? Does the individual have the ability to make the change? The rows of the matrix look at motivation and ability from three dimensions: personal, social and structural.

“What VitalSmarts found through their research is that most organizations look for a silver bullet--one or two sources of influence to drive change--and they continually apply them,” Ardell says. “VitalSmarts also found that you really need to overwhelm a problem by simultaneously using all Six Sources of Influence. If you do that, your chances of success improve ten-fold.”

Acknowledging that people resist change for a variety of reason, Ardell says the methodology uncovers the underlying cause of the resistance which may not be what we often assume--that it’s a motivation issue. It could be an ability issue.

Using a procurement team’s implementation of an e-sourcing initiative as an example, she says that those reluctant to use the new technology may not have the training or experience needed for this more disciplined approach. The organization can deal with the influence challenge in that instance by providing the necessary training, she says.

Throwing money at a problem, a tactic often used by organizations to influence change, won’t work, Ardell says. “What you want to do is first go after the individual’s intrinsic motivation. Change is more effective--and sustaining if it comes from people’s values and beliefs.”

To influence change using motivation, Ardell suggests field trips or vicarious experiences. “To solve a long-standing supplier quality issue, for example, you might have the supplier’s line technician visit your production facility,” she says. “Seeing the problem first hand and forming a personal relationship with your production team can help create urgency and initiative for resolving stubborn problems.”

The keys to success are to identify the vital behaviors that drive change and then apply strategies that use all six Sources of Influence simultaneously to change the behaviors.

For more information on Paladin’s new service Influencing Change, contact Ardell by phone at (770) 315-1581 or by email at bmardell@paladinassociates.com.

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