ACHIEVING ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ADAPTABILITY

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A Perspective on Organizational Sustainability

Sustainability… ahh the buzzword, it is everywhere!
Environmental sustainability, financial sustainability, business sustainability, just to mention a few. The word is used plentiful, but what does it mean? To understand the concept in general terms, let us take a reference from the dictionary. The lexicon defines sustainability as the ability to continue or to last over time.

The word “sustainability” gained popularity during the 80’s. Yet, its use was limited to a wave of environmental or “green” initiatives. Eventually, the concept evolved to much more than just being “green.” When it comes to the sustainability of an organization, it means having the capacity for continuous improvement in pursuit of a mission. Rather than a milestone, organizational sustainability is an ongoing effort to remain competitive, relevant and valuable. As such, the path to sustainability requires willingness and commitment to adapt as conditions change. Sustainability can take many forms at different levels of an organization.
The Importance of Becoming Sustainable

We live in an age where changes associated to technological advances, population growth, market demands and environmental concerns, amongst others, influence business decisions. As such, the sustainability of an organization is contingent upon its ability to adapt to those changes while remaining competitive and valuable.

Unwillingness to do so, can lead any organization to failure.

Just consider for a moment what happened to big companies like Kodak—an organization that used to be the strongest competitor in the photography film industry. Despite having been the inventors of digital photography, Kodak opted to remain close to its traditional camera film-based business model. By the time they realized film-based business could no longer compete with the digital photography industry, it was already too late.

The same reluctance to change is prevalent in the public sector. In procurement, particularly, the lack of flexibility in certain policies and procedures makes the implementation of change even more difficult. The typical phrase of “we’ve always done it this way” discourages generation of ideas and promotes complacency. Consequently, preventing the organization from doing business more efficiently.

Unwillingness to adapt is what precludes organizations from achieving its full potential and from moving forward in a world that is constantly evolving.

Getting There

The uncertainty of the unknown, is what typically holds organizations back from adopting immediate change.

However, small changes can make a huge difference towards becoming sustainable. For instance, promoting a positive work environment can increase employee performance and productivity. In fact, research shows that when people work with a positive mind-set, performance improves by 31% and employees are 3 times more likely to bring creative solutions.

Another way of developing sustainability is by looking into the outcomes of best practices or innovative ideas implemented by similar organizations in order to develop their own path towards sustainability.

For innovative organizations that are not afraid of change, the process of remaining sustainable is also an opportunity to lead the way of excellence and inspire others to do the same.
Leading the Way of Excellence and Inspiring Others to Do the Same!

And that is precisely what the Procurement Department at Hillsborough County Aviation Authority is doing!

Since its establishment in 2011, the department has taken on a mission to become “an industry model” for procurement excellence. The department understands that continuous improvement and adaptability is required to meet business demands.

Soon after I joined the team, less than a year ago, I concluded there are four reasons why this department is a model for sustainability.

First, our focus on professional development and accreditation demonstrates the professional competency of the team. Currently, over 90% of the procurement staff holds certifications from the Universal Public Procurement Certification Council (UPPCC).

What is more impressive is that in less than nine years, the department has already achieved some of the most prestigious accreditation and recognition for best practices in public procurement. Such recognition includes the NPI’s Achievement of Excellence in Procurement (AEP), NIGP’s Outstanding Agency Accreditation Achievement (OA4), NIGP’s Pareto Award and the FAPPO Award for Excellence in Public Procurement (AEP). In fact, during 2019, the department earned the highest score of an entry for FAPPO’s AEP. Such recognitions show the department’s commitment for continued pursuit of excellence, which supports its credibility and increases customers’ trust in the aptitude of the team.

Emphasis on both, professional development and accreditation has developed a sense of pride amongst team members, which reflects in the quality of services provided.

Second, the department believes in partnerships and increased collaboration because “none of us is as good as all of us” (Ray Kroc, McDonalds Founder). Such approach has encouraged out-of-the-box thinking to bring creative solutions while fostering innovation.

Third, the department strives to achieve efficiencies by leveraging different technologies. For
instance, review of contracts, as well as, the execution and notarization of documents is done electronically. In addition to expediting existing processes, the approach has also contributed to increased transparency while minimizing environmental impact. By the end of the first quarter of FY20 total copy usage had already decreased by 9.5% and color copy usage by 15.1% when compared to FY19.

And lastly, to demonstrate how the department creates value, it releases a “Buyer’s Flyer” intended to highlight departmental news, accomplishments, and to recognize the collaboration of partners that contributed to our collective success.

Furthermore, the department issues an annual benchmarking report to show how strategic objectives were met and to identify areas for improvement. The report is a way of communicating to our stakeholders how the department is contributing to the overall sustainability of the organization.

As previously mentioned, sustainability is an ongoing effort to remain competitive, relevant and valuable. The sustainability of an organization is contingent upon its ability to adapt as conditions change. Therefore, implementation of sustainable practices not only allows an organization to achieve its mission but also inspires others to do the same.

Because change calls for innovation and innovation leads to progress! Now that’s what organizational sustainability is all about!