OpusView™

Compliance, with OpusView

Attainment is just the beginning

Regardless of industry sector, regulation and its compliance will no doubt form part of your annual, monthly, even daily plans. Compliance is a pre-requisite for trading and, as such, companies of all sizes spend large amounts of their financial and physical, often constrained resources, attaining and then retaining accreditation.

However, it is not just the fear of the auditor that drive organizations to comply. Accreditation can be the difference between participating in a client's supply chain or not. With Malware and Cyber Security attacks becoming more sophisticated and representing a significant risk to business operations, companies realize that adhering to standards such as ISO27001 or Cyber Essentials is no longer just about gaining another accolade to place on the website. The survival of the business is a far more compelling motivation.

Compliance is big business and just as with other pressures upon the market, the challenge it presents won't stand still. Just as cyber-attacks evolve and exploit new weaknesses, the policies and standards designed to thwart such attempts will in turn evolve in a constant cycle. For example, the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (GDPR) in April 2016 is a new standard to improve data protection for individuals within the European Union (EU). Companies may face strict fines for not complying with the standard when breaches occur. With an enforcement date of 25 May 2018, this will impact every business as they will be driven to improve the processes and controls that protect the personal information they hold. Within the Automotive sector, businesses worldwide need to successfully transition to the International Automotive Task Force (IATF) 16949:2016 quality management standards by 14 September 2018, and so it goes for other sectors too. The common factor is that regulatory compliance regardless of business sector will be part of your delivery landscape.

This demand is not just limited to the initial effort in gaining accreditation. That is just the start of the journey. The complexity of ongoing delivery of the cross-functional processes that the project implements will need to be sustained long after the team has disbanded.

Budgets and buy-ins

In large enterprises it is the norm to have dedicated in-house teams and the budgets to continuously focus on the process of change within the organization to achieve compliance.

For the SME the landscape is very different ranging from working on a shoe-string and with no resources but your own efforts to heavily loaded and under-resourced quality management functions. In both cases, the challenge can seem both daunting and difficult. Furthermore, gaining the buy-in from business owners who see any activity not driving the top line as one to avoid, is one of the many challenges facing those working within SMEs.

Clarity of attainment

At the start of the compliance journey there is a clear vision shaping organizational efforts, galvanizing hearts, minds and energy to achieve the defined goal. Priorities are set, resources allocated and activities are co-ordinated and driven through a dedicated project team.

Projects are excellent vehicles for delivery. They drive a level of clarity that is able to cut through the ambiguity of Business As Usual (BAU) that can pre-occupy busy departments. Defining clear goals, identifying key resources, establishing timelines, roles and responsibilities, activities, critical paths... all of these combine to create a team focused upon a common goal to deliver defined value.

But what happens after the standard has been achieved? Projects will invariably transition the responsibilities of running new processes and modified controls onto individuals and departments to own. These responsibilities will sit alongside and compete for attention with the existing demands of their new owners. But is this the best model?

Compliance as usual

BAU is the term used to describe the tasks and activities performed to maintain a steady state within which the company operates. Well understood processes executed to deliver known outcomes. However, BAU processes are also those subjected to constant scrutiny by organizations employing continuous improvement methodologies. A mind-set of challenging the status-quo, looking for more efficient ways of performing that can create greater value for an organization is now mainstream. Businesses realize that standing still is not an option and just as their competitors evolve strategies, so must they.

In a world where operational teams are measured by Service Level Agreements (SLA) and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) with unpredictable demand, the risk of non-compliance through a key process not being performed can quickly increase, especially inside such a challenging environment subject to changing priorities. Couple this with the activities of well-meaning, but sometimes ill-informed process efficiency initiatives, then one can see that relying upon BAU to deliver compliance is a risky business.

Even in larger enterprises with dedicated risk management teams, the ability to monitor and report compliance related activities is hugely challenging. Grabbing and maintaining the attention of executives is difficult, as their focus will invariably be upon revenue related activities. The challenge is no less difficult within smaller organizations where the pressure for revenue is arguably higher, and so the likelihood of having sufficient dedicated resources for compliance is very remote.

So, if running compliance through BAU isn't the answer, then what is?

Project Compliance

Implementing a project management approach to running operations, specifically those relating to compliance, presents a viable alternative that addresses many of the risks identified within BAU delivery.

Clearly, the initial attainment of the standard was delivered as a project providing all the benefits mentioned earlier relating to goal clarity and task assignment. However, the biggest advantage to adopting a project management approach, is the reporting oversight that this provides.

Setting specific milestone dates with linked activities drives focus and provides a very visible indication of compliance. Reporting this status to the executives is easier as it is within a familiar format to the delivery portfolio and so gaining their attention is less of a challenge.

The process is straight forward. Each department treats each standard or accreditation that they are responsible for, as a program that runs for say, the full year. Specific milestones are created based around key events, such as audits or recurring activities linked to processes, that needed to be evidenced.

By creating these plans alongside the other projects that flow through the department, one is able to drive the same level of clarity in terms of success criteria, ownership and importantly resourcing that is required for other projects. The steps of establishing the plan, identifying skills, allocating resource, mobilizing the workforce, creating and sharing content or documentation, assigning tasks and tracking progress, are all performed and ensure there is consistency of delivery and key activities are not overlooked. Furthermore, evidence is captured of process adherence negating the need for a specific activity preparing for audits.

Building your compliance around an ongoing program, leveraging the best practices, documents and toolsets to deliver successful outcomes, will reduce the stress that comes from such responsibility.

Yes, but you can't plan operations

This approach to running an operation through a project mind-set, can be met with a level of scepticism and resistance. The usual challenge cited is that operational demand is mostly reactive and therefore cannot be planned. Another is that demand is full of uncertainty with previously unforeseen issues being raised, and so how do you plan in effort required?

Whilst these are reasonable concerns, the reality is that these characteristics are not uncommon within projects and so the techniques used to manage them can be applied to operations too. Risk and Change Management are the cornerstones of effective project management and ones that are clearly relevant within an operational environment. Instead of resisting change, as a way of minimizing risk to operational stability, it is better to recognize that change is a constant and therefore build mechanisms and processes that facilitate it. Building a sense of proactivity within the operational environment and the teams that support it, moves them away from being order-takers and towards one more in control of their destiny. This not only improves the reputation of these often maligned teams, but also lifts their morale and with it, reduces the risk of attrition in an area where systems and domain knowledge is hard to replace.

Looking at operational challenges as a project or series of projects, and setting out to shape the successful delivery to the satisfaction of the stakeholders, really can bring around transformational results.

Communicating context

One of the biggest challenges with project delivery is communication. This is especially so where teams are geographically dispersed. This could be it in a different country, a different building or indeed a different floor. As soon as there is any physical separation within the project team, communication suffers. This is why co-located project teams have become so popular with organizations, recognizing the value in having a well-connected team surrounded by highly visual project information. This rich context combined with instant communication, enables project teams to perform at a much higher level than those that communicate less frequently.

However, co-location isn't always possible and in the case of a year-long project such as compliance, neither is the ability to have the whole team working on the project at the same time. Distributed teams who wish to collaborate, need to do so leveraging digital toolsets. But sadly, this is where the issue of context dilution creeps in.

When teams are given disparate tools to collaborate, the result is a narrowing of the communication bandwidth with information being condensed and aggregated to fit into the confines of the user interface. This information is also dispersed across the different toolsets, which adds to the abstraction of context, leading to disconnects and ultimately slowing the team in their progress.

We at IdeasCast, have experienced this first hand and so when we set out to develop OpusView, our Enterprise Social Software Platform, we knew that capturing and maintaining context was a core requirement.

Rich visualization features, such as Mind Mapper and Sketcher, enable the teams to share and convey their ideas effortlessly. Blogs and Wiki components are complemented further by voting and feedback features, supporting real-time collaborative document sharing and decision-making. These all combine to build the momentum that is characteristic of high performing teams.

Killing complexity with social delivery

Effective teams are able to overcome complex problems through collaboration, sharing ideas, experience and skill sets. With remote teams, engagement can be an issue. Getting the attention of the person sitting next to you is relatively simple, but achieving this remotely is far from straight-forward. Yes, instant messaging can avoid the latency that email brings, but this unstructured medium then makes it difficult to co-ordinate responses.

OpusView overcomes this issue through providing features that people will be very familiar with, having used Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media platforms. The ability to "like" updates and posts makes it easier for teams to engage and contribute to the direction of the project. Furthermore, voting mechanisms built into OpusView, makes gathering opinion of the team and arriving at important decisions more timely and that can also be evidenced later.

The workforce of today is increasingly digitally literate and is used to leveraging digital networks to make decisions and connect with their worlds. Having a platform that supports this way of working, will improve workforce engagement and with it, drive greater results. This engagement will also improve compliance, as individuals leverage best practice and are guided through processes built to comply with industry standards.

Templates for success

One of the few upsides to a compliance project, is that the tasks and activities that need to be performed, will remain largely unchanged from the previous year. Yes, there will be some updates and where a new standard is adopted, then clearly a new set of controls and processes will be implemented.

However, just because a process hasn't changed, doesn't guarantee the outcome will be as it was last year. The reality is all projects will have an element of uncertainty, which needs to be managed. A skilled Project Manager (PM) leverages their experience to define plans that incorporate appropriate activities they instinctively know are required for a successful outcome. Likewise, they also understand the importance of risk management. Miss a key risk or leave it untreated, and at some point it will become an issue that derails the project through additional time or expense to resolve.

This is where the knowledge of experienced PMs really pays off. Through their intellect and hard lessons learnt, they've developed a rich understanding of how to shape and manage their projects to maximize the likelihood of a successful outcome. They are the stars that every Sponsor wants on their project. They are in high demand - not just within your company! Retaining these PMs is vital, but so is the upskilling of your new talent, to broaden your delivery capability and develop the stars of the future.

So what if you could leverage industry best practice in the form of templates that automatically generate project plan structures and associated activities? How much time would that save whilst reassuring you that all the key areas are covered? What if you could then refine these templates and augment with your own best practice, conventions and standards; thereby capturing the invaluable experience and intellectual property generated from your successful compliance projects for all to share?

This is exactly what we have built. OpusView templates enable you to generate your project structures within minutes, which can then be modified, saved and then shared with your peers. We see it as helping you to encapsulate everything that is great within your project teams, to drive exceptional results and achieve predictable outcomes. This improves consistency and the likelihood of future success, whilst also recognizing the contribution of your star performers.

Compliance is not an option

In a complex operating environment where certifications are mandatory requirements for doing business or dealing with hidden foes looking to exploit security weaknesses, companies need to adopt and adhere to standards designed to protect their customers and their data. Companies that fail to do so, open themselves up to exclusion, significant risk and also financial penalties.

Compliance will continue to evolve along with the risks and issues that these standards were brought in to address. As the risks increase, so will the demands of the standards. Establishing an effective method of delivery is essential for organizations who wish to avoid the impact of non-compliance, whilst minimizing the drain on their valuable resources. Adopting a project mentality to the ongoing delivery of compliance and leveraging technology that support real-time collaboration and social working within a project framework, will enhance your chances of success.

OpusView is a purpose built project delivery platform that will accelerate your compliance programs alongside your other strategic initiatives. With templates developed by experts within their respective fields, you will benefit from the years of experience these professionals have gained, giving you the confidence that you are following best practice. No more leaving to chance or learning as you go, with all the risks that such approaches carry.

So, act now. Shape your compliance delivery, adopting a project mind set and harness the capabilities of OpusView, to accelerate this delivery and ensure the survival of your business.

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