

Business Execution Blues

Getting things done may sound simple in theory,
but in reality, it can be almost impossible

“Here’s what we need to do. Now let’s get it done.” We’ve all heard those words from management. And whether orders refer to a restructuring, new product rollout, brand expansion, outsourcing effort, or any other change, we’ve all too often been privy to the great-intention-meets-brick-wall results. Why is it so hard for successful companies filled with smart people to align their objectives with their activities? Why does “getting it done” seem so impossible?

Conflicting organizational activities, silos, redundant processes and confusing governance policies block effective, consistent execution. It’s a big problem. And yet being able to execute and react quickly to changing business opportunities and technologies is critical for success. There is a fundamental gap – call it the execution gap – between the best laid plans and their realization.

1. Make visible what is invisible through “experiential workshops.” It’s the unseen little things (the things you don’t know about your own business processes) that create the biggest problem. The exceptions, the workarounds, the embedded business logic in applications that were in over time in response to customer changes are the tiny grains of sand that make the shellfish inedible. You must identify these little things so critical to your big things to be able to bridge the gap between what management wants to do and what happens operationally.

Conduct “experiential workshops” to dig quickly but deeply into 1) your objectives 2) your requirements, 3) your understanding of what happens in specific areas, and 4) your near invisible workarounds, exceptions, and “embedded activities, tools, and applications” that are the real muscles and sinews that determine what really happens and how effectively. These workshops help you identify and understand the “experience” of all those involved (people, processes, assets and technology). Not will they help you avert disaster, but they may help you turn the “invisible sand” in your processes into a pearl.

2. Work to bridge the disconnected links between everyone involved in getting things done. Different groups speak different languages. Marketing people, management people, operations people, technology people, financial people ... they can all be in the same meeting, yet come out thinking they agreed to do entirely different things. This sense of disconnect – in terms of expectations of actions, of languages – would be almost comical if it didn’t breed so much rework, costs and frustrations. It’s more than just a disagreement over words. A lack of common understanding of, say, what an “account” is or what constitutes a “customer” leads to different teams doing different things perpetuating divisions of expectations and activities. You need common DNA of Execution that allows everyone to align themselves in the pursuit of the same goal. That way, the operations folks, marketing folks and management can communicate and execute with each other clearly, consistently and productively.

3. Recognize the employee loyalty shift and support it. The move from “vertical” to “horizontal” loyalty – from identifying oneself as an entity aligned with peers, friends and associates – has major implications on how to get things done more effectively. The rapid mistrust many people have regarding upper management has forced them, understandably, to look elsewhere for support and professional development. When you consider the proliferation of wired means of community networking such as Google and blogs you can see that the “horizontal loyalty” trend will only accelerate in the future. If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. Here are a few suggestions:

- Develop means to set up as many communities of practice around specific skill-sets and area of focus as possible. This provides a way for people to “seek out, and set up, and support each other” around topics of their own interest.
- Establish small SWOT teams to address specific business problems. Set a clearly defined goal but loosely defined set of methods as to how to meet that goal. Commit to supporting whatever recommendations the teams figure out.

- Aggressively support outside associations, education and networking opportunities. Enhance your employees' knowledge and capabilities to grow, professionally and personally, If you don't, the competition will.

4. **Conduct “visibility” workshops** to trace “what connects with what, where, when, how and how much”. When you make a change, you must be aware of what impact that change will have throughout your organization. Yet, too often, the knowledge of “what connects with what” – from business process through technology infrastructure – is cloudy, if not shrouded in deepest darkness. It is precisely such darkness that leads to the surprises and the sudden disruptions that can be so time-consuming and costly. Illuminate these connections (and eliminate frustration and finger pointing) by conducting specific workshops that focus on a specific business objectives and metrics through business processes through software applications and infrastructure.
5. **Realize** that you can't go it alone. Collaborate! Business opportunities need to be responded to quickly. Few organizations have all the resources to do so. There are as many kinds of business collaborative models as there are business objectives. It's critical that your business objectives fit the appropriate “collaborative” relationship you form. The days of choosing among “managing costs” or “growth” or “creating innovation” are over. You need to do all. As one client said, “You have to manage the impossible decisions between managing costs, while growing revenue, while fostering innovation.” Collaboration is becoming one of the core competencies of a successful company.

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