

Performance Management: Creating the Performance-Ready Organization

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Performance conjures up images of orchestras, ballerinas and actors on stage. As individuals the performers are passionate about their role, schooled and practiced. Collectively, they are choreographed, rehearsed and dressed for the stage. They are performance ready. Is your organization performance-ready for the “show” it must put on?

Indicators of Success

Successful organizations are fully prepared in ways parallel to the performers. Each leader has a passion for leadership, and has engaged in academic and skill-based learning about leadership. They are well practiced in their leadership role and eagerly receive and act on feedback. The organization planfully choreographs the processes and activities core to success with their customer. The workforce is well practiced at what they do—tactically and strategically—and they are outfitted for their roles.

Common Challenges Effecting Performance

Few organizations are fully prepared in this way. Hardly makes sense, does it? If theatre, which is purely for enjoyment, requires this level of preparation how much more is required of an organization that intends to create success with its customers and employees?

Commonly employees are heads-down in the work and uninvolved in planning . As a result employees lack clarity about where to focus their energies and attentions as well as lacking certainty about their specific role in driving collective success and maximizing performance. Middle management’s focus is often on command and control over day to day tactics rather than one of encouraging and enabling leadership and success for tomorrow. Senior teams often expend the greatest portion of their time monitoring the financial and production dashboards. They invest more time studying yesterday and today than in analyzing the future and the opportunities that creates.

So what does a performance-ready organization look like and how can you position your organization to be at the height of performance?

Workforce Performance Determines Organizational Success

These organizations intentionally prepare in two ways. They are “physically” fit—fully ready for the technical work—the products, processes and tools. They are “mentally” ready—demonstrating readiness to meet difficult challenges and responsive to changing marketplace conditions. Most organizations are reasonably fit in the “physical” realm; most are much less ready in the “mental” realm.

Resolving “mental” readiness deficits is essential. Organizational results arise from the efforts and energies, talents and attitudes of the workforce. Unless they are engaged in the change and actively involved in making it happen, the change stalls. This is true no matter how effective the technical strategy is. A flawed strategy, well understood and adopted by the workforce can actually take the organization farther than a fabulous strategy the workforce is not committed to. Job one is to pay attention to the people issues and they will pay attention to the business issues!

Organizational Strategic Planning

The executive team leads by casting a vision that enables everyone to “see” where the organization is headed. When expressed as a story to be told over and over it allows people to actually see the future. And that is the first step to creating it. Next, the executives lead organization-wide communication of the vision, seeking feedback and counsel from middle management and the workforce all along the way. The goal—generate high degrees of agreement organization-wide on what is to be accomplished and engage employee’s energies and passions to create it.

Maximizing Performance Management through Knowledge Sharing

Effective leaders assure information moves freely both ways by convening cross-functional groups of employees to learn from each other through healthy dialogue and debate about the vision. These conversations help leaders identify, understand and address resistance. Rather than view resistors as people who “just who don’t get it”, resistance is tapped into as a source of information about objections to the plan. Objections arise from many sources—misinformation, confusion, fear and often a genuine concern for the good of the organization. Founded or unfounded, workforce resistance is predictive of low success and as such requires keen attention. When resistance is understood, directed energy can be invested in creating organizational “mental” readiness.

By now you’re likely thinking: “Yeah, right. There’s no time for that! We just have to get the merger accomplished or the new product launched. We don’t have the luxury of time.”

Time is a ubiquitous enemy, one you will always do battle with. The only question is when you will engage in the battle. You have two choices. One is during the strategic planning process when you can define the parameters of the battle and control the fallout. The other is in the problem cleanup process when the battle lines have been drawn for you and the pressure is on. Organizations where performance management is at its best invest time up front rather than expend it on the back end.

Craft an Implementation Strategy and Plan

With a collective understanding established and resistance constructively addressed, the executive leadership team fleshes out an implementation strategy. That strategy addresses the realities of making the change happen, resource requirements and the impact of conflicting organizational priorities. Next middle management crafts an implementation plan, fleshing it out across the organization in the same manner as the vision. The goal is to address interdependencies across the organization, connecting employees to resources and information.

The implementation plan is complete when it is detailed enough to prepare workgroups to define what must be done and to establish their role in creating success. Individual supervisors are then responsible to keep everyone focused on the vision, assigning accountabilities that keep the plan moving forward. The mid-level management remains intimately engaged, keeping all the elements of the workplan on a collective radar screen; their role becomes monitoring progress, removing obstacles and providing resources.

Establish a Cross-functional Oversight Team

Performance ready organizations create a team to serve as the “conductor” of the performance. The team is led by a skillful project leader and made up of cross-functional subject matter experts. This leadership team is championed by an executive. The leadership team conducts regular reviews of progress against plan. Problem resolution and contingency planning are their key tasks. The senior management team regularly attends management reviews, rewarding success and addressing organizational challenges that will inhibit success. This full circle executive engagement is core to success.

Sound like Fantasy Island to you? It need not be! Consider the next important change for your organization. What is the value of being performance-ready for that change? What is the impact of not being ready?