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In this issue:

- Success with Cross-Functional Integration
- Lisa's tips - April's topic - The Power of Relationships
- Recommended Reading

Success with Cross-Functional Integration

In the last few years, every consulting project has included an aspect of cross-functional, cross-company, or cross-border integration. Thus, what could be more important than figuring out how to integrate (businesses, projects, etc) successfully? It is an opportunity to leave your competition in the dust, as there are no easy solutions, and it's not a problem that money alone can solve.

So, what are the keys to success? I've found these to be the top three: 1) Leadership. 2) Clarity of goals. 3) People, cultures, processes, systems.

1. **Leadership.** As my HR mentor says, "It begins and ends with leadership." It is undoubtedly true; thus, you must start with leadership. Who will lead the integration? Are they the best choice for bringing people together? Forget about technical requirements to start. It is essential to have a leader!

   What is a leader? Consider these words or phrases: Respected. Trustworthy. A positive role model. Makes ethics and values a top priority. Willing to take prudent risks. Has strong communication abilities. Sees people as assets; not expenses. Always remembers the customer. Strives for the next level of performance and innovation. And my personal favorite – accepts accountability for issues but shares credit for wins!

   Of course, there are no "perfect" leaders. Find the best qualified person, provide them support and tools, and "go".

2. **Clarity of goals.** It is amazing how this one simple step consistently achieves results. Don't think you've communicated goals. Make sure they are clear, understood and supported.

   Typically, in cross-functional initiatives, unclear goals are the culprit of less-than-desirable results. It is not as easy as it sounds. You must get into enough detail cross-functionally, cross-culturally, cross-company to get to a goal that makes sense to everyone. Everyone must understand WHY they are working towards the goal. How do they provide value to the end result? Why does it matter?

   One way to make sure you have clarity of goals is to figure out your pay and rewards systems. Can one function succeed while another fails while achieving the objective? Sounds ludicrous but occurs frequently. Make sure everyone is on the same page to the degree of detail required to align rewards and recognition systems – even pay. For example, is the goal part of the pay performance criteria for each person? If not, why would everyone be on the same page?

3. **People, cultures, processes and systems.** Now the hard work. How can we integrate the people, cultures, processes and systems for the initiative in a win-win-win sort of way? This is why leadership and clarity of goals are critical, predecessor requirements.

In my experience, there are countless (and seemingly endless) issues that arise. These can range from how to free up enough resources to focus on the integration effort (as the same people are required for special initiatives and to run the daily business) to disagreement over which processes and systems will provide the best result. Addressing each of these issues, continually communicating and requesting feedback is vital. Again, remaining relentless on the goal is essential, as it helps to address many of these issues.

There is no substitute for solid leadership and unrelenting focus. Value and utilize each person's strengths. Find overlapping areas of cultures, processes and systems. Look for opportunities for each person, culture, or company to benefit from the other. Ask for feedback and ideas. Don't give up. The path will emerge.

Achieving a win-win in integrating cultures, people, processes and systems will not only yield a huge financial return (and likely put you far ahead of your competition), but, more importantly, it will also result in happier and more productive and dedicated employees – what could be more important?

Lisa's Tips: The Power of Relationships

There is no doubt that the power of relationships is significant. Sometimes, it is depressing that the best person for the job, project, political position etc goes unnoticed while the so-so (bordering on or sometimes decidedly a poor choice) wins the day through relationships (with nothing to back it up). On the other hand, why not create sustainable relationships so you can ensure success of the best choice?

1. Make your first thought of others – instead of thinking about what's in it for you, think about what you can do to provide value to someone else.

2. Get to know what's important to those who are important to you and your business – what's the point about guessing and providing all sorts of bells and whistles you find compelling if your customer (or employee, family member etc) doesn't care about them? Instead, concentrate on finding out what's important to them.

3. Think value – instead of thinking about price or spending money at all, consider what the person or business values. Does the person value tangible objects or just time and focus?

4. Be a positive role model – what can you do to make a difference each day? It could be as small as a few words of encouragement to a fellow employee, business acquaintance or the person at Starbucks.

5. Keep in touch – as much as good intentions are important, be one who prioritizes the time to stay in touch. Be someone who values relationships.

Recommended Reading

""*Lessons from Private Equity Any Company Can Use*"" by Orit Gadiesh and Hugh MacArthur – I found this to be a compelling book on how to create more valuable businesses regardless of who owns them.

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