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How Robust is Your “Organizational Capability?”

These are the things that place leading organizations ahead of the pack:

- The collective ability to execute marketplace strategy successfully
- The capability to deliver on the performance required to execute strategy
- The ability to consistently deliver value to customers and reduce the cost of delivering that value

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Making Sure Employees Adopt New Technology

There is an ongoing need in organizations to introduce new technology, yet people are often highly resistant to welcoming and adopting the new systems. Getting people to adopt new technology involves many of the principles required for overcoming resistance to any change—and then some, according to Warner B. Wims, Ph.D., President of WBW&Associates.

What do you do?

- Engage those impacted to define the problem or opportunity that improved technology can address
- Involve them in identifying how technology will support their needs
- Help them see the immediate short-term payoffs (e.g., better information, efficiencies) as well as long-term benefits
- Describe benefits of the technology in terms of the users’ own core values (e.g., they may value having better information, the impact on their reputation, autonomy, safety and security, or their customers, or their own personal success)
- Explain and show how new technology can help reduce errors, increase productivity, enhance quality, increase customer service, and save money
- Select a user-friendly name for the technology that emphasizes its user value (e.g., “Customer Link”, “Management Facilitator”)
- Tie technology strategy to organizational and business strategy
- Clarify the implications of implementing the new technology strategy and also explain the consequences of not applying that strategy
- Clarify the eventual return on investment
- Demonstrate how technology will lead toward more meaningful and satisfying work
- Identify early adopters – those particularly interested in technology who are intellectually stimulated by being involved, some initial skeptics, and people in leadership roles
- Give recognition to early adopters
- Make initial experiences with the new technology as user-friendly as possible
- Choose simple applications first, to get people involved, then roll out additional uses
- Start with something that is likely to create enthusiastic early adopters who will spread the word to others
- Modify the workflow as needed to ease implementation
- Pay attention to the quality of information input into the system
- Establish a measuring process for tracking gains resulting from technology, and compare results of users versus non-users
- As it’s installed, be alert to and address unintended consequences (e.g., new problems or opportunities)
- Advertise success stories
- Establish information and technology management as an ongoing core competency of the organization

Help People Find Their Own Solutions

Coaching is a process of helping people find their own solutions, not of telling people what to do. Ask questions that help the person you are coaching to do their own thinking and self-coaching. Some good questions are:

- What approach do you believe will work to improve your situation?
- What do you think the impact will be if you take that course of action?
- What do you believe the consequences will be of that decision?
- What has led you to that conclusion?
- What do/did you see as the best way to act in the situation?
- What conclusions do/did you draw?
- When X (problem) happens, what does that allow you to do (opportunity)?
- What evidence do you have that your assumption is really true?
- If you handle the situation a different way, what different results might you be able to achieve?
- Is there something else that concerns you that you have not told me?

Guided questions, and being willing to ask the tough ones, help people to navigate their way to solutions.

The Fundamentals of Organization Design

There are a few simple yet profound factors to be considered when designing organizations. These factors fall into two categories: the mechanism of the organization (how the “machine” that is the company works) and the human relations component.

With respect to the mechanistic side, ask:

- Does the design support the business and operational strategy? Start with spelling out how you want things to operate, e.g., should activities be grouped by function, product, geography? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- Does the design facilitate the flow of work? Create flowcharts showing how things will be produced.
- Does the design enable managerial control? Ensure that the design is manageable and can be monitored.
- Does the design result in doable jobs? Ask if there are combinations of jobs that entail a manageable scope of responsibilities.
- What are the various levels of interdependencies and cross-department interfaces?
- What is the design’s impact on the utilization of resources?
- What is the design’s impact on specialties and economies of scale?

With respect to the human dynamic side, ask:

- How will existing people fit into the design? Will you need to replace some of these people?
- How will the design mesh with the organization’s existing values and assumptions about what is important, the nature of the business, and what it takes for the enterprise to be successful?
- How will the design affect power relationships among different groups? Who will gain and lose power?

Combining the mechanistic and human dynamic sides, the next questions are:

- What are the implementation challenges?
- (And, once implemented) Is it working?

When Feedback Hurts

It is rare, if not impossible, to live a life or work in organizations without experiencing feedback about ourselves that bothers us in some way. Highly effective individuals, although perhaps hurt by the feedback, find it to be a tremendous learning opportunity.

Acknowledge both the content of the feedback and the feelings it generates in you. Don’t feel guilty or ashamed for having these feelings. Let go of what you would have preferred to receive as feedback. Identify your specific feelings. Does your response indicate a pattern of how you respond to similar feedback? Let go of the past. Consider what the others’ point of view might be. Ask questions of yourself and others to validate and gain full understanding. Finally, make a list of constructive actions to address the concerns raised in the feedback. In doing so, you will feel better, grow faster, and be more effective and admired.