For many years, HR professionals have attracted the attention of senior managers with their refrain about “our people are our most valuable resource therefore we should manage them well”. They have moved from “performance measurement” through “performance management” and now they talk about “talent management”.

All well and good. But none of these approaches squarely addresses the executive team’s most crucial question - how well is our strategy being executed? Why? Because they focus on employee competencies and not on the organization’s own strategies.

A football coach coaches his team play-by-play, day-to-day and game-to-game. He builds team improvements into each game as the season progresses. At the end of the season he might achieve the team’s objectives. If he didn’t do this regular coaching and improvement throughout the season, what chance would he have of meeting the team’s objectives – and keeping his job?

Business, government and non-profit organizations rarely operate this way. They develop a plan, often at considerable expense, promise to follow it, and then shelve it until part-way through the year. Then they dust it off, find they have not achieved all their objectives, and the employees are told that the planning process didn’t work.

Wrong! The planning process might be just fine – it is the execution management process that doesn’t work!

Welcome to the exciting new world of strategic execution management or “SEM”, an innovative approach which enables the organization to deliver on its promises.

Strategy execution management reflects a fundamental difference in concept and approach – more like the football coach than the traditional manager. The employee competencies might be superb, but if they are not applied directly to the execution of the strategy, they are less than valuable. SEM is about knowing how well those promises that the Deputy made in the strategic plan are actually being delivered from day to day.

If there were something such as a “strategy execution management system” what would it look like? First, it would be initiative based, not competency based, and focused completely on the organization’s strategies. Second, it would use explicit performance agreements between the managers and the staff. Third, goal measurement would use pre-set criteria and explicit performance measures and would talk about how goals were “missed”, “met” or exceeded”. Fourth, everyone would be in
the loop, so the system would direct and manage internal communications with pre-scheduled and pre-scored progress meetings. Fifth, the system would be dynamic so that it would easily reflect changes in goals and initiatives as the organization’s circumstances and priorities change during the year, as they always do. Sixth, the senior management team and the program managers would have dashboards so that they could review the performance of their part of the organization whenever they wished. Seventh, it would be low cost, low risk and work right out of the box - it would have to be web-based and not require the implementation of expensive software. And eighth, it would be scalable so that any size of organization could use it.

Impossible, you might say? Well some of organizations in the US, UK and Canada are already using proprietary SEM systems every day, with great success. Some non-profits are too, and so is my firm. Shouldn’t you?

Expect to hear a lot about strategy execution management systems over the next few years!

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