

With Change on Steroids, Do You Need to Change?



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Today's leadership challenges can be overwhelming — and somehow seems different from those of the past. We are constantly bombarded with a barrage of information of indiscernible reliability. The ability to metabolize everything, on a non-stop basis, causes one to focus on the urgent and loudest in lieu of the important and what matters.

At the risk of oversimplifying, successful leadership directly correlates to the quality, and integration, of preparation and execution.

Preparation: focus on outcomes — reduce stupidity

It's an age-old axiom, plans collapse when they confront reality. If virtually all plans fail to some degree, even those created by good leaders, perhaps, we're not approaching the

concept of planning in the most productive way.

Most of us are familiar with traditional planning processes.

The organization decides on goals, defines requirements, analyzes alternatives, sets milestones, and institutes feedback loops for continuous improvement. Throw

in the natural tendency to be overly optimistic at the start of a new endeavor and you created the usual ingredients for your next crisis because the plan failed to anticipate

Keep a plan in perpetual draft — never publishing a final version. This helps create the mindset of continually working the plan — avoiding that dreaded “shelf-ware” status.

the future. Then, comes the all-too-common response: “don't blame me, I followed the rules.” That's when one can readily identify a manager who has failed at leadership by not accepting accountability for producing the wrong outcome.

So, how to stop the insanity of doing what one always does to get the same, wrong answer? Challenge the concepts and policies associated with planning within your organization. Regard the activity associated with these processes to have more importance than the creation of a final document. This should help create the mindset of continually working the plan — avoiding that dreaded “shelf-ware” status. In so doing, you want to create a journey of discovery and working together toward common goals for your team. In this journey, it's critical to allow for discovery, missteps, changed assump-

tions, new goals, personnel changes, and altered policies. In my view, the best plans are more about organizational commitment and less about brilliance.

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Like plans, processes are viewed as essential organizational tools. Most evolve over time — continually refined to enhance predictability and eliminate past mistakes. Unfortunately, these become entrenched in optimizing the way in which work is currently performed — and are almost always the enemy of innovation and how work should be performed. The result is that managers tend to view system performance as being more important than the performance of the people using the system. This is the antithesis of good leadership.

Are there leadership constructs that address today's workplace challenges? Are they different from the past?

Recent research suggests that a small subset of leadership skills closely correlates with leadership success in modern organizations. McKinsey & Company came up with a comprehensive list of 20 desirable leadership traits as a baseline. They then surveyed 189,000 people globally, across many industries. They found that high-quality leadership teams typically displayed four, distinct types of behavior over those of lesser effectiveness. Namely:

- ✓ Solve problems effectively
- ✓ Operate with a strong results orientation
- ✓ Seek different perspectives
- ✓ Support others

I was struck by the two focus points of this short list — outcomes and people. When we strip away the emotional and intellectual clutter that obscures one's “leadership perspective,” I maintain that results and people are the only top-tier measurements on which leaders should strive and be judged. But, I'm reminded of one my most difficult challenges in helping organizations and leaders to improve their performance; that is convincing them that the research is applicable to their situation. Indeed, ideas are a “dime a dozen”. However, it's the execution, combined with the proper preparation, which delivers results that matter in a world of constant change. ■

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