

Keeping teams focused and getting things done

When business leaders try to solve the issue of effective strategic deployment, they often feel that staff do not have the level of focus they would like. Here, JARA's CEO Jamil Rashid explains how Structured Leadership can address this.

The reason we all want more focus is clear - it means more sales, less costs and getting more done. What isn't clear is how to get this increased 'focus' from staff and how to keep it there. JARA's Structured Leadership approach is, foremost, a business execution methodology that helps you achieve much higher levels of focus from your teams.

FIRST – KNOW YOUR EXECUTION RATE

Although persuading your staff of the opportunities through better focus is not easy, measuring it is. And this is the first step to persuading them. Beyond 'having a gut feeling' how do you know when there is an absence of focus? Answer: when strategic plans and activities are consistently not being met. This is about the percentage of things they actually get done compared to the things they said they would do, on time and to cost. This is the 'execution rate' (ER). Focus therefore is the measure of the number of 'hits' on strategic objectives.

Such figures often reveal a significant disparity between what businesses seek to achieve and what they actually achieve. The

execution rate shows you how big that gap is. The vast majority of the time the execution rate is really low – often 30% or less! This means that a huge percentage of all strategic objectives fail in some way or another. Either they never happen or they come in late or over budget.

GETTING THE FULL PICTURE

The first thing to do is get a full picture of what your execution rate is. Only measuring against the top five things your team planned to do this year is not getting a 'full picture'. This can only be achieved when you start to measure against all of the things you were supposed to achieve every week, week in, week out. This shows you how many objectives were hit and how many were missed. Suddenly, the picture becomes much clearer and much bigger, and you quickly find out where the opportunities for improvement lie.

Getting your teams focused on their ER will automatically create a higher level of focus, but it is not the complete answer. To get to this, you need to get closer to the reasons that lie behind poor execution.

When you look closely, the reason things are not done and targets are not met, are that people waste time on activity that has no bearing on the strategic objectives of the business or take too long to do what needs to be done.

People behave like this because they do not have the enough clarity, engagement or discipline, and what Structured Leadership does is introduce these things into the everyday working environment.

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS -THREE PHASES FOR GETTING CLARITY

Strategy fails because too many decisions are made too quickly without being adequately thought through. Strategy also fails because people veer off course, even after they have identified the right things to do. These two things happen because there isn't enough clarity within your business processes. Achieving consistent

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clarity comprises three things: alignment, planning and analysis.

1. Structured alignment - Understand how your team is cascading your objectives and help them to define how they will be realised at



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every management level. Structured alignment focuses firstly on identifying the activities necessary to achieve those objectives, and secondly on examining the rationale behind every key activity, to ensure it is genuinely aligned to those objectives. This helps to eliminate irrelevant activity. Put in place a process so that alignment can be constantly checked. Alignment is not a one off activity.

2. Structured planning- Agree a method of planning and review with your team. This is crucial for good execution. Get everyone to develop highly visible, detailed plans at all levels. Good planning is about applying consistency, structure and detail, and will help people spot when they're going off course.

3. Structured analysis - Implement a simple and common analysis process. This will ensure that strategic plans and all key decisions are driven by evidence and data not assumption, "gut feel", experience or incomplete facts. Make sure that all key staff use this common process. Although it is fine for them to use their own tools where needed, ensure you agree a minimal standard or process that must be followed in the decision making process. Whilst you can never prove everything, structured analysis encourages everyone in the business to question key decisions and link back to evidence.

When these three areas are in place, things should start becoming clearer. But the

picture still isn't complete. For a fully focused workforce, there needs to be engagement.

PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE - OBTAINING A CONSISTENT LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

When managers ignore key personnel in the decision making process then it doesn't matter how smart the manager is or how brilliant the decision - unless the people who are going to execute that decision, are engaged in that decision, you will rarely achieve the results you hope for.

Every leader and manager knows this and yet rarely adequately engages managers and staff in the selection and planning of those initiatives. As such there is little buy in and without buy-in tasks just don't get done, or they get done inefficiently.

All management will say that they engage their people. But what they don't say is how they are engaging and how consistently they are engaging. The problem is there are many definitions of engagement. Defining rules for engagement so that everyone understands exactly what it means for your business and establishing a common understanding with staff, are imperative to the success of the process.

Structured engagement provides the framework for this to happen. It allows everyone in the business input and the opportunity to challenge others who do not adhere to agreements, regardless of rank. The commitment you show to the process will

lead directly to increased execution rate and to getting real focus from your teams.

BUT CAN THIS NEW LEVEL OF FOCUS BE SUSTAINED?

SUSTAINING FOCUS

Strategy fails because people are undisciplined both in what they do and how they do it. Having great plans is essential to success, but they are only effective if you measure against those plans regularly. It is this discipline of measuring and reviewing that is almost always missing and prevents sustained focus.

The other half of this equation is 'standard' of working. By creating standards you are delivering an important message about your principles and how your business operates. In the same way environmental standards or quality standards set a benchmark for performance, 'structured leadership standards' will create a benchmark for improving execution rate that can be duplicated up and down the business. Without these standards, you won't be able to see where discipline issues exist.

We assume that great people make great companies, but it is great systems that make great companies. Great companies are consistently clear, engaged, and disciplined and within that environment everyone is a focused star, not just the chosen few.

