



## The organisation fitness programme

### Introduction

How do you build a future proof organisation, whilst cutting costs? Many businesses are walking this tightrope during difficult economic times – seeking efficiencies and driving down expenditure, whilst preparing for future upturn and growth. Often organisations turn to redundancy programmes to survive, but can you get ahead of the game without needing such drastic measures to save costs?

### The holy grail of organisations - efficiency!

Efficiency for organisations is about two things - driving out waste (unnecessary cost, effort, time and allocation of resource), and freeing up capacity and capability to do the more important things that will drive business success. Creating efficient organisations enables businesses to maximise the potential value of their proposition and their people, and ultimately to boost performance.

### Where to focus?

Typically organisations look at driving efficiency tactically – how to take 10% of operating expense out of the business until they can ride the storm. Their focus is on reducing costs. But aren't there other, smarter ways to achieve the same goal? What about driving up performance by 10% instead?

Here we share some examples of approaches we have seen used successfully in businesses when searching for that holy grail.

- **Organisation design** – fine tuning the way an organisation is structured and 'built' to support strategy
- **Organisation development** – building 'working together' practices between functions, teams and individuals to achieve success
- **Values driven performance enhancement** – using core values to bring to life the behaviours that are critical to assure performance delivery

### Organisation design – what to look for?

Before you dive in, take time to give your organisation a healthcheck – is it efficient? Most organisations can name aspects of the way they are organised that simply 'don't work', or sticky processes that slow things down. These are your potential efficiency gains. The focus areas we have discussed with clients are:

- Operating model - does it make logical sense? Are functions easy to understand, have clear boundaries of accountability? Is it easy to see where aspects of business strategy are clearly owned? Are there low value add, transactional activities that could be outsourced? In fact are there practices that are simply not required anymore?
- Organisation structure – how effective is the people architecture? Are line manager spans too narrow to enable people to be empowered? Are there too many queen bees and not enough worker bees? What about layers in the business – is the CEO too far away from the front line teams to be in touch with customers?
- Roles and responsibilities – are all roles in the business consciously contributing to the achievement of goals? Are there areas of duplication or overlap that could be eliminated?
- Decision making processes – are these clearly defined? Are decisions made with speed and urgency when required? Is it obvious who has the ultimate accountability? What about meetings – do they result in good business decisions, or are they talking shops?

Each of these questions could stimulate an organisation review. Look at your business from a new angle (use your strategy as a start point) and challenge its design. The results you could achieve may surprise you e.g. stripping out

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superfluous roles and freeing up capacity to focus on other priorities, reducing costs, eliminating role confusion, streamlining decision making, creating new energy and motivation amongst your people. We have seen each of these outcomes achieved through a quality organisation design initiative.

## **Organisation Development**

We all know the value of teamwork – but do your teams work efficiently across the organisation? A recent case study showed us the tangible benefits to be gained from bringing together two teams, from separate functions but with similar goals, to drive out efficiencies. Asking these teams the simple question – ‘how do you think you could collaborate more to gain efficiencies?’ gained us a wealth of data on which to build a comprehensive action plan for both teams to implement. Issues were raised such as:

- Activities and tasks that were delivered by both teams, using different tools and techniques. Harmonising their activity by creating a ‘one tool’ solution meant the tasks became easier, and complexity was removed, thereby saving time and effort
- Their ability to manage a required geographical reach – by combining forces they effectively doubled up their presence on the ground in their overseas operations, and became ambassadors for each other’s products
- Communication – many ways were identified whereby simply sharing each others plans between the teams enabled them to avoid diary clashes, duplication of effort, and create further collaboration opportunities
- Conflicting messages to the business – internal marketing opportunities were established to deliver combined communications from both teams, giving a seamless service to their internal customers

Not only did the teams come up with some great solutions, but the process of generating them had benefits too. All members of both teams participated in a brainstorming and solutions planning workshop. The result was a highly engaged and committed group of people, who knew and understood each other’s challenges, frustrations and workloads better, and were enthusiastic about making change for the better.

## **Values driven performance enhancement**

What if you need to achieve wildly ambitious goals, but with no increase in resource or costs? Look to your values for the answer - they are there for a reason! They characterise the essence of your organisation, and demonstrating them in everyday life can differentiate you from your competition, and make you unique. So why not use them as a lens with which to give focus to your performance? Here is how we worked with a recent client to do just this.

Our client has ‘accountability’ as a value. We worked with them to give further depth of meaning to this concept, by describing the specific behaviours that brought accountability to life in their organisation. This bespoke ‘model of accountability’ was then used to shine a spotlight on their performance over the previous quarter during their annual leadership conference. Leaders were asked to critically evaluate how well they had demonstrated these behaviours – what had gone well, and what had not. This led to a reflective session where each leader identified one aspect of their accountability behaviour that they could improve, articulating its resulting performance benefit to the organisation. The results surprised us. Not only did each member deliver some outstanding commitments that were values aligned, they were so inspired by the exercise that they chose to cascade it into their parts of the organisation.

You can have the same effect with any business critical value, and the impact can be widespread. Performance becomes more focused, behaviours are driven by a common theme and everyone has a language on which to base their understanding of ‘what good looks like’.

## **In summary**

Efficiency is not just about cost cutting. There are other, more positive, more stimulating and more inspirational ways to deliver in this current market without resorting to such drastic measures. Our clients are using these methods, and seeing positive results. The key is to spot the need early, and act on it quickly. All such solutions need time to become embedded so strike while the iron is hot, and avoid complacency!

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