

Project Management: The Bigger Picture

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Imagine being the star performer that managed a successful large and complex project. You and your team put in the time and effort to ensure unprecedented success. However the “C-level” (CEO, CFO, CIO, etc) later announces that the Company is downsizing due to poor corporate performance. What and where did it go wrong? Morale takes a catastrophic beating.

The ability to deliver corporate strategy is largely dependent on organisational execution capability. Doing the right things and doing it right.

C-levels, through heightened knowledge and wisdom, have developed uncanny abilities to visualise success and the creative image of how to get there. More than others, it is generally the ability of the people in the organisation to respond to the vision that makes it or breaks it. Investment management, needless to say, is of great concern to the survival and/or growth of any organisation. You only reap what you sow. Poorly placed investments will time and again deliver poor results.

Corporate business plans are often the domain of CEOs and a select few Executives within the organisation. Traditionally, the ownership and responsibility of business plans lie solely within this group. Exceptionally talented executives can sometimes fulfil this accountability successfully, but lesser mortals eventually do succumb to the pressures of overburdening attention of the resultant requirement for centralised management. In this particular scenario, the corporate business plan often do not find their way into the grasp of the broader staff within the organisation. Joe Bloggs may have little or no idea on how to relate his job to the big picture and be oblivious to what useful contributions he is adding, if at all. He is simply told what to do, that’s it, ‘just do what I say and things will fall into place’, is not an uncommon management practice. It is also not an uncommon view that staff that are able to better understand how his work contributes to the achievement of the corporate goals can provide a better-detailed scope of the work process required to do the job more efficiently. After all, he or she has the in-depth knowledge, skill and the expertise on how to perform the job better. This is a not new concept. Successful users of the Balance Scorecard promote ownership of the goals and objectives of the corporation to every single individual staff member who can then expand a clearer view of his role within the big picture.



Doing the right projects normally commences after the business plan has been developed. Typically the business plan will articulate the organisational vision, mission, key result areas (KRAs), objectives and targets of the organisation. However, most organisations excel in this undertaking employing well-established and matured processes, but the challenge obviously is to find the best method and technique to deliver that vision. Operational plans thereafter are developed collectively by the Executive Team, outlining high-level solutions and approaches to meet the objectives with a view of delivering the strategy in the most effective and efficient manner. Effectiveness is achieved through the alignment of action items (called projects and programs) with the stated objectives and the primary purpose of realising value for money.

Key factors that can influence the effectiveness of the strategy being implemented successfully include:

- ❖ Projects are tested against its strategic fit
- ❖ Projects are ranked and prioritised against resource constraints and imperatives
- ❖ A balanced application of project mix and level of focus
- ❖ Benefits management

***“the inability to execute well” and “a lack of strategic vision”
are the top two reasons for CEO failure.***

- Building CEO Capital™ Study

This level of the strategic plan will set the initial scene to develop structured portfolios of projects. This forms the basis for executives to reach an agreement on the potential effectiveness of the proposed plan to deliver the strategy. It also serves as a rallying point to deliver strategy as long as the plan is monitored and reviewed against its validity for relevance, currency and effectiveness. Following corroboration, everyone can gain better understanding of the direction and priorities placed on implementation. With wider understanding, there is a greater chance of obtaining support from the business units and thus increased chance of successful strategy delivery.

Doing it right provides the efficiency factor for delivering that strategy. There is not much point in delivering efficiently if there is no alignment to strategy. Although you could get lucky. But if we rely too much on luck, we may be better off spending more time at a Casino. Efficient strategy delivery means:

- ❖ The right people doing the right project
- ❖ Having defined process
- ❖ Timely and accurate reporting required for strategic decisions
- ❖ Utilisation of integrated tools that capture single entry data
- ❖ Providing organisational support structure

***“almost 50% of CEO turnover events were due to the failure to
effectively execute key organisational initiatives”***

- The CEO Turnover study

Efficiency is about achieving on time, on cost and to the stated objectives against an agreed baseline. Organisational efficiency is achieved by delivering the projects consistently across all business units. We need both individual and organisational efficiency for that extra edge.

Doing the right things and doing it right are so dependent on each other and so intertwined that one cannot function well without the other to accomplish the greater sum of its parts. It is therefore crucial to obtain the highest levels of support within the organisation to bring about an optimum outcome.

Application of change management principles is vital throughout the lifecycle. It is valuable in assessing the organisational readiness, monitoring behavioural changes, and the concluding acceptance of sound portfolio and project management principles as an organisational mechanism to achieve the stated goals. Excellent technical solutions alone are insufficient and inadequate. Committed people will determine the level of success of your initiative. The combination of both will give the added advantage over others.

Organisational response is fundamental in understanding the challenges facing organisations in translating its strategic plan through a strategy delivery mechanism. Functions, processes and role definitions built into the organisational structure will provide the constitution needed to meet these challenges. A good business process re-engineering (BPR) support may be of good use during this phase.

Finally, if we define corporate governance as about putting limits to power, setting rules of work standards and establishing corporate codes of conduct, project, program and portfolio management is the means of providing a structured approach in providing value for money of

investment. Linking them together in a cohesive manner could spell the difference between making or breaking your business.

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With over 25 years of project, program and portfolio management experience in diverse industries, Tony expertise is in organisational capability development of project, program and portfolio management capabilities providing governance framework to link efficient delivery of projects and programs to effective delivery of organisational strategy. Tony was part of the PMI OPM3 Leadership Team (2000-2002) and is a contributor to the development of the PMI's program and portfolio management standards published in May 2006.