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Agility = Sustainability

By Robert E. Cannon

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High Engagement, it's not your standard employee motivation. – All organizations today are faced with intense competition and rapidly changing markets, customers, products, delivery, systems and services. The rate of change is outpacing our ability to adapt. We are witnessing this inability to adapt every day as organizations in business, government, religion, healthcare etc. fail right before our eyes.

Sometimes, I think we overlook the fact that the rules of the game have changed as well. Early on in my career, businesses were evaluated by the amount of assets or "Retained Earnings" showing on their books. "Good Will," used to be a bone of contention in determining the real value of an organization. Today, little if any attention is paid to "Retained Earnings" as we have switched to measuring "Return on Investment" and other measures of efficient use of capital. In part, efficiency has become the key instead of asset accumulation because a product and process that is generating a profit today may be tomorrow's buggy whip. Change in our environment and change in the rules we are measured by all point to the need to be adept at change.

To me, an agile organization is one that is proficient at change. It can do anything it wants, whenever it wants. There have been lots of different operating strategies presented over the last few years to help us transform our organizations to higher levels of performance. These strategies include, LEAN, TQM, Continuous Improvement, SMED, Process Reengineering, Mass Customization and others. Sadly many of the efforts to implement these strategies have failed not because the strategy was wrong, but rather because agility was missing in the organization. Agility is a people issue not a strategy or process issue. Successful adoption of operating and transformational strategies will happen much faster and with less expense as an organization becomes more agile.

Like evolution and mutation in living organisms, organizational adaptability or agility is a core survival requirement. Achieving agility in an organization is contrary to the way most of us were trained to manage. Most management training even today is still based on the work of Frederick Taylor. It is an approach to management that worked well at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, but is sadly out of date in today's highly sophisticated world where computers, cell phones, the internet, radio and television are commonplace and workers are better educated and more involved in their world than

ever before.

As I witness the changes in organizations, I become more convinced daily that all of the process improvements in the world will not by themselves solve the problems facing organizations. It is time for a new approach to management that involves people in the issues that affect them leading to engagement, creativity and commitment in the workplace. Jack Stack in his book *The Great Game of Business* makes the case when he says, "...productivity depends on people. I don't disagree that machines can make you more competitive. They can absorb overhead. They don't take breaks. They don't go on vacation. They don't sit around wasting time. What machines can't do is figure out how to make money. Only people can do that. If you have people who know how to make money, you'll win every time."

For too long, we have relied on a leader - who by virtue of position, greater experience, wisdom or

skill, is relied upon as the problem solver and that leader fails to ask for or accept input from team members. Psychologist Patrick Laughlin and his colleagues at the University of Illinois recently released a new study that shows that the approaches and outcomes of cooperating groups are not just better than those of the average group member, but are better than even the group's best problem solver functioning alone.

Not only do groups make better decisions, but once agreed to, the decisions are far easier to implement and have much greater likelihood of success. More and more research points to the advantages of group engagement and decision-making. It is no longer a matter of why you should adopt a high engagement strategy with your people to gain agility, but rather how to implement this process.

Roadway is a trucking company that is currently implementing a high engagement strategy in their organization with some tremendous successes. Their approach includes three elements and may very well be the model for other organizations. The three elements of their program are: 1.) Education, 2.) Tools, 3.) High Engagement.

First, Roadway is spending a lot of time educating their people about the business. They have adopted much of the thinking from Jack Stack's book, *"The Great Game of Business."* The key is to help their employees understand the financials of the business and how they affect the numbers. Second, they have trained their people in the basic principles of LEAN so that they can evaluate current processes and procedures and have a basis for making changes that will positively affect the bottom line. Finally, they have adopted and use a positive approach to achieving "High Engagement." Rather than focusing on the problems in the company, they have chosen to look at the strengths of the company and build on those strengths using David Cooperrider's 4D model for positive change.

The results at Roadway have been impressive. There are many stories of success at individual terminals that are now being shared across the company and in the meantime just one of the measures they use has recorded a \$10 million improvement over the last 4 years. Roadway is rapidly developing Agility to help them face a very competitive and rapidly changing world. Without it, they would most likely not have survived.

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Byline

Bob Cannon helps visionary leaders make decisions that gain a competitive advantage. Check out other interesting articles available in the Taking Aim newsletter available at www.cannonadvantage.com. Bob can be reached at (216) 408-9495 or mailto: bob@cannonadvantage.com

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Robert E. Cannon, successful business executive, left the corporate world in 2001 to start Cannon Advantage; a firm specializing in helping visionary leaders and business decision-makers who want to enhance the competitive advantage of their organizations

Fuel Index (A measuring stick of a company's success)

By Ramakrishna Pochiraju

Every company has a Vision, a Mission and a set of core Values. Companies develop multiple strategies that implement these Values to realize the Mission.

I always wondered, Is there any relationship between a company's Values and company's success? Is there any influence of these Values on a company's sustainability? Do the company's Values impact other factors of success? How do we measure that impact?

Below I will try to explain the relationship between Values and other factors of success.

Every company should have Values that increase and support higher Productivity (P), Quality (Q) of product, Quality of workplace and Quality of working. Every company's Values should also encourage and reward Creativity (C). The Values of every company should serve as a primary fuel to fan the growth of the 'company-employee' social system. For Values to produce higher Productivity and instill Creativity while upholding highest possible and attainable Quality in the process, the Values need to thrive in the air of honesty. Honesty in a company is synonym for courage and is a measure of risk readiness and agility. I define the Fuel Index as one that measures the sustainability and agility of a company. Higher the Fuel Index the better a company's chances for a successful and sustainable leap from good to great.

I suggest to list the company's Values and rank each Value from '0' to '2' in regards to how the Value impacts the "Productivity", "Quality" and "Creativity" ('0' means Value has no impact on). Also rank the values from '0' to '2' with respect to the risk involved to implement the Value to achieve higher Productivity, Quality and Creativity ('0' being no risk involved in implementing that Value to achieve the

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goals). Score (0 to 2) Score (0 to 2) VALUES PRODUCTIVITY QUALITY
CREATIVITY RISK FACTOR (P) (Q) (C) (R) -----
----- Total ----- Average -----

$$\text{Fuel Index} = (\text{Avg R})[(\text{Avg P})+(\text{Avg Q})+(\text{Avg C})]$$

The range of the Fuel Index is 0 to 12. If the Index is

0 to 5

The score of 5 and above is a good indicator of sustainability and agility of a company. They have the right mixture of fuel (Values) and air (Risk/Honesty). They need to make sure to maintain and constantly evaluate the strategies that are used for this combustion. That means the company should constantly make sure to have right people implementing the values and performing the checks and balances needed to assure a sustainable growth.

Ramakrishna Pochiraju is a registered Professional Engineer. He has over ten years of experience in serving local, state and federal clients as a consulting engineer in designing roads, highways and freeways.

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Physical Fitness – Is Your Workout Missing Something?

Dog Agility Training

Dog Agility Equipment: Where Do I Begin?



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