

Strategy Execution Consulting



Live Environment Success

By Karen Schroeder

We have just come through the toughest recession in decades and are faced with a long, slow, jobless recovery according to the pundits. Customers are starting to reappear, but they want everything at rock-bottom prices and they know they can demand the best for that in this buyer's market. You have to deal with the fact that you lost a significant percentage of your resources over the last three years, you have to meet high expectations and you probably will not be able to staff up to meet those expectations for some time to come. As a consequence, you are juggling more demands than ever before. How do you ensure that you are doing the right things as efficiently and effectively as possible? How do you prioritize the many demands being placed upon you? Is there a process for tracking that prioritization? Is it explicit or implicit? Are all your people aware of what matters most? Is it consistent enough to allow them to perform against goals they thoroughly understand?

Despite the recession, innovation didn't entirely shut down in the last three years and customers are requesting the latest and greatest. So you have to gear up, train and retool to meet those requests. You need to know where you are going in the medium-term in order to make the right decisions. There are too many cautionary tales out there of companies that invested too heavily in dead ends

and got left by the side of the road as more innovative companies passed them by. But having the perfect plan is only half the battle. Execution is the other half. You need to see how well you are progressing against the goals you have set, particularly the ones that will not be achieved in the short-term but need regular activity to keep them on track. It is far too easy to let today's firefighting crowd out tomorrow's goals, no matter how important those far-off objectives are. Without a way to manage the more distant goals, they will just never take place. We have all experienced waking up a couple of years later and realizing that we never did "do that important thing", whatever it was.

The idea of Live Environment Success is that you need to be successful the moment you go live with your goal, whether that is a new process, product or service, even a new business unit. If you have an objective that stretches across a longer period than the current fiscal year or budget cycle, chances are something is falling through the cracks in your planning system. You need to put all the elements in place with sufficient long-term planning to avoid the cost and distraction of last-minute firefighting when your project comes due. Companies should get very specific about what it takes to be successful on the go-live deadline and all the aspects that would have to be in place to ensure a positive experience from day one. You need to build back from that end-state and then measure progress toward it, evaluate the pace of that progress and ensure that the resource requirements are being communicated across internal silos.

There are good tools on the market for tracking and monitoring performance toward initiatives, once the planning has been done. That allows teams to look at different scenarios and ensure they are revising the plan in light of real world developments, particularly when there are high levels of uncertainty in the plan. Reviewing it at the "Goldilocks" interval (not too short, not too long) is a good way to keep on track, especially if the initiative plan spans a longer cycle than the usual operational plan. The tools span the spectrum from big, expensive

software that connects to the company's ERP and is installed on sight by the company IT team to smaller, cheaper Software-as-a-Service offerings that require no implementation and can be configured by the team using them. These lighter-weight offerings are quite handy for teams starting this process that are still experimenting with the right metrics because they tend to be much more flexible. Once the team has a lot of experience with the process and knows exactly which metrics are optimal, getting a tool that is more deeply integrated with the company ERP may be the logical next step. However, the tool is always only as useful as the thinking and process it supports, so the choice of tool should follow completion of the Live Environment Success planning.

A great place to start this process is by assessing how you are tracking progress toward your initiatives today. Questions to ask include how regularly does the initiative get reviewed, who is the responsible manager and executive sponsor for each initiative and how are they monitoring progress, how well are new acquisitions, new hires and training projects aligned to the initiative, and many others. Karen Schroeder works with companies to help them align their initiatives with their goals, create a plan for tracking initiative performance, and implementing the tools for regular monitoring and management of strategic initiatives. Karen has helped companies like Verisign, the World Bank, and a number of smaller entities ensure live environment success.

Contact Karen for a complimentary 1 hour consultation.
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